

# **PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI**



## **PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES**

### **DAILY HANSARD**

**TUESDAY, 11TH JULY, 2017**

**[CORRECTED COPY]**

# CONTENTS

	<u>Pages</u>
Minutes ... ..	2004
Communications from the Chair ... ..	2004
Presentation of Papers & Documents ... ..	2005
Presentation of Committee Reports ... ..	2005-2007
Accident Compensation Bill 2017 ... ..	2008-2010
Debate on the 2017-2018 Appropriation Bill 2017 ... ..	2010-2134

## List of Speakers

Hon. M.A. Niumataiwalu  
 Hon. A.D. O'Connor  
 Hon. B. Singh  
 Hon. H.R.T. Politini  
 Hon. Prof. B.C. Prasad  
 Hon. S.V. Radrodro  
 Hon. Dr. B. Lal  
 Hon. Lt. Col. N. Rika  
 Hon. Lt. Col. I.B. Seruiratu  
 Hon. V. Pillay  
 Hon. P. Singh  
 Hon. A. Sudhakar  
 Hon. Lt. Col. L.B. Tuitubou  
 Hon. J. Usamate  
 Hon. A.T. Vadei  
 Hon. S.B. Vunivalu  
 Hon. M.R. Vuniwaqa  
 Hon. A. Sayed-Khaiyum (Right of Reply)

## Committee of Supply

Head No. 1 - Head No. 15 ... ..	2086-2134
---------------------------------	-----------

**TUESDAY, 11TH JULY, 2017**

The Parliament met at 9.43 a.m., pursuant to adjournment.

HONOURABLE SPEAKER took the Chair and read the Prayer.

Before we begin, I would appreciate if all mobile phones can be turned low.

**PRESENT**

All Honourable Members were present, except the Honourable the Honourable Ratu S. V. Nanovo.

**MINUTES**

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Madam Speaker, I beg to move:

That the Minutes of the sitting of Parliament held on Monday, 10th July, 2017 as previously circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed.

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- Madam Speaker, I beg to second the motion.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

**COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE CHAIR**

Welcome

I welcome all Honourable Members to today's sitting.

I also welcome members of the public joining us in the gallery and those watching proceedings on television and the internet and listening to the radio. Thank you for taking interest in your Parliament.

Ministry of Health – Cancer Awareness

The Ministry of Health, in conjunction with corporate partners and non-governmental organisations, is advocating cancer awareness this week. As part of this initiative, the Fiji Cancer Society, together with Motibhai company will be hosting a “Bushells Fiji’s Biggest Morning Tea” tomorrow, to raise funds, create awareness and provide opportunity for people to come together to talk about cancer. This is a very commendable initiative and I encourage all Honourable Members to wear royal blue to support this worthy cause tomorrow, Wednesday 12th July, 2017.

Delay – Daily Hansard

For the information of the Honourable Members, the *Daily Hansard* Report will be delayed due to the prolonged sitting last night. This will be distributed to Honourable Members as soon as the Secretariat finalised the report. Thank you.

**PRESENTATION OF PAPERS AND CERTAIN DOCUMENTS**

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call upon on the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Public Enterprises, Civil Service and Communications to table his reports.

HON. A. SAYED KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, in accordance to Standing Order 38, I present the following Reports to Parliament:

1. Volume 1 – Audit Report on Whole of Government Financial Statements and Annual Appropriation Statement 2016 (*Parliamentary Paper No. 99 of 2017*);
2. Volume 2 – Audit Report on the General Administration Sector 2016 (*Parliamentary Paper No. 100 of 2017*);
3. Volume 3 – Audit Report on the Social Services Sector 2016 (*Parliamentary Paper No. 101 of 2017*); and
4. Volume 4 – Audit Report on the Economic and Infrastructure Sector 2016 (*Parliamentary Paper No. 102 of 2017*).

Madam Speaker, also at this juncture, pursuant to Standing Order 45(5), I hereby table my written response to Question No. 138 of 2017 by the Honourable Professor Biman Prasad.

HON. SPEAKER.- Please, hand the Reports and your written response to the Secretary-General.

(Reports and written responses handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. SPEAKER.- Pursuant to Standing Order 38 (2), I refer the following Reports to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts:

1. Volume 1 – Audit Report on Whole of Government Financial Statements and Annual Appropriation Statement 2016 (*Parliamentary Paper No. 99 of 2017*);
2. Volume 2 – Audit Report on the General Administration Sector 2016 (*Parliamentary Paper No. 100 of 2017*);
3. Volume 3 – Audit Report on the Social Services Sector 2016 (*Parliamentary Paper No. 101 of 2017*); and
4. Volume 4 – Audit Report on the Economic and Infrastructure Sector 2016 (*Parliamentary Paper No. 102 of 2017*).

**PRESENTATION OF REPORTS OF COMMITTEES**

Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence -  
Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) – Articles of Agreement

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call on the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence to have the floor.

HON. LT. COL. N. RIKA.- Madam Speaker, I am pleased to present the Report of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence, which was assigned to examine the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) - Articles of Agreement.

This Report provides the committee's review, conclusion and recommendations from oral and written submissions received and deliberated upon by the Committee as per Standing Order 110(a).

The Report is divided into four parts. Madam Speaker, the accession to the AIIB - Articles of Agreement will be beneficial to Fiji in terms of:

1. Offering a new multilateral development financing platform committed to development in Fiji. The current's stance and medium-term outlook is that the Fijian Government will require sources to undertake capital expenditure such as construction of roads, jetties and bridges, et cetera and joining the bank will allow an addition financing source for Fiji;
2. Providing finance to member countries, only economic considerations are relevant to the bank's decisions, the bank is not influenced by political character of any member;
3. Reinforcing our constructive and positive relationship with the People's Republic of China; it will enable Fiji to negotiate better terms for loans with existing multilateral donors such as the Asian Development Bank and the World Bank, as the bank will provide competition to these multilaterals; and
4. The bank will also provide technical assistance and will work with each member to engage services within the region. The bank will recruit qualified personnel globally and the criteria for recruitment will be based on technical competence and experience in related sector.

Madam Speaker, I commend this Report to Parliament for its consideration.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, please hand the Report to the Secretary-General.

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. SPEAKER.- Pursuant to Standing Order 121(5) and Standing Order 130(4), the Standing Committee has now reported back.

Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence -  
Doha Amendment to the Kyoto Protocol to the UNFCCC

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call on the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence to have the floor.

HON. LT. COL. N. RIKA.- Madam Speaker, I am pleased to present the Report of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence, which was assigned to review and examine the Doha Amendment to the Kyoto Protocol to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

This Report provides the Committee's review, conclusion and recommendation from oral and written submissions received and deliberated upon by the Committee as per Standing Order 110 (a).

The Report is divided into four parts:

Madam Speaker, ratifying the Doha Amendment will be beneficial to Fiji in terms of:

1. acceptance of the Doha Amendment as a non-Annex 1 Party, express our continuing commitment and support to the implementation of the Kyoto Protocol;
2. as President of COP 23, Fiji's submission of its instrument of acceptance to the Doha Amendment will send a strong signal on Fiji's commitment toward climate change action; and
3. reiterate the Presidency's call to developed countries, to increase climate action and continue to reduce greenhouse emission.

Madam Speaker, I commend this Report to Parliament for consideration.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Please, hand the Report to the Secretary-General.

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. SPEAKER.- Pursuant to Standing Order 121(5) and Standing Order 130(4), the Standing Committee has now reported back. I now call on the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence to have the floor.

Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence -  
Establishment of the ISA – ISA Framework Agreement

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call on the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence.

HON. LT. COL. N. RIKA.- Madam Speaker, I am pleased to present the Report of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence, which was assigned to review and examine the Framework Agreement on the establishment of the International Solar Alliance (ISA) (ISA Framework Agreement).

This Report provides the committee's review, conclusion and recommendations from oral and written submissions received and deliberated upon the Committee as per Standing Order 110 (a).

The Report is divided into four parts. Madam Speaker, ratifying the ISA Framework Agreement will be beneficial to Fiji in terms of:

1. promoting solar technologies;
2. enhance prosperity with new business, models and investment in the solar sector;
3. formulate projects and programmes to promote solar applications;
4. develop innovative mechanisms to reduce cost of capital;
5. build a common knowledge e-portal; and
6. facilitate capacity building for promotion and absorption of solar technologies and research and development among other countries.

Madam Speaker, I commend this Report to Parliament for its consideration.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Please, hand the report to the Secretary-General.

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. SPEAKER.- Pursuant to Standing Order 121(5) and Standing Order 130(4), the Standing Committee has now reported back.

HON. SPEAKER.- We will now move on to the next Item. I now call upon the Honourable Attorney General to move his motion.

### **ACCIDENT COMPENSATION BILL 2017**

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 51, I move that the:

- a) Accident Compensation Bill 2017 be considered by Parliament without delay;
- b) Bill must pass through one stage in a single sitting of Parliament;
- c) Bill must not be referred to a Standing Committee or other Committee of Parliament;
- d) Bill must be debated and voted upon by Parliament immediately after the vote on the 2017-2018 Appropriation Bill 2017, together with the Consequential Bills for the 2017-2018 Budget, tabled on 29th June 2017; and
- e) time for the debate of the Consequential Bills, including the Accident Compensation Bill 2017, be limited to ensure that all such Bills are debated and voted upon during this sitting of Parliament.

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Madam Speaker, I beg to second the motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call upon the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Public Enterprises, Civil Service and Communications to speak on his motion.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, given the fact that the Members have contributed to the Budget debate, I will be very brief.

As highlighted in the Budget Address, we are seeking to set up the Accident Compensation Bill, essentially to replace, at least for the time being, the Motor Vehicle's Third Party Insurance Act 1948 which is the existing Act. There are a number of reasons why this Act needs to be repealed and a new provision needs to be put in place, essentially to provide the immediate justice to ordinary Fijians who are currently not being covered (for want of a better word), under the current legal framework.

Furthermore, Madam Speaker, we sent down a team to the Accident Compensation Corporation (ACC) in New Zealand. The New Zealand Government, together with their High Commission and the visit by the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the ACC itself, have been very helpful in facilitating this. The model that ACC is being based upon is actually very much worth emulating, as we have seen that in Fiji, for a number of very basic reasons, people have been denied justice over the years. Let me just give you an example, Madam Speaker.

Currently, the provisions within insurance contracts do not provide protection to all third parties who are injured from accidents involving motor vehicles, and not all insurance claims are redressed. As a result, many Fijians who have been victims of motor vehicle accidents will be denied compensation. As an example, an innocent pedestrian who is hit by a car, may be denied compensation

by the insurance companies, simply because the driver of the vehicle did not have a drivers licence or was drunk when driving.

Madam Speaker, claims for compensation have always been generally unduly delayed with insurance companies or in the courts, and victims of motor vehicle accidents have often waited for years to get compensation, if any. Indeed, currently, the total cover for passengers in buses is only \$40,000; a maximum aggregate payment of \$40,000, irrespective of the number of passengers on the bus.

However, Madam Speaker, as we have said, we do not simply want to set up this Commission for the sake of setting it up, only to deal with third party insurance; we:

- We are looking at it in the future, to bring other forms of accidents within the purview or within the premise of this Commission that we intend to set up;
- we have also liaised very closely with the Reserve Bank of Fiji, looked at some re-insurance methods as announced in the Budget; and
- We are looking at LTA, being the one-stop-shop for all motor vehicle registration needs, including this particular levy that will be charged for accidents.

With those introductory remarks, Madam Speaker, I will confine myself to that and I move that this be considered with all the other Consequential Bills in respect of the Budget that was tabled a week ago. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. The motion is now open for debate and I invite input, if any, from Honourable Members.

There being no input, Honourable Attorney-General, you may make your concluding remarks, if any.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- No thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Parliament will now vote.

Question put.

The Question is:

That pursuant to Standing Order 51, that the:

- a) Accident Compensation Bill 2017 be considered by Parliament without delay;
- b) Bill must pass through one stage in a single sitting of Parliament;
- c) Bill must not be referred to a Standing Committee or other Committee of Parliament;
- d) Bill must be debated and voted upon by Parliament immediately after the vote on the 2017-2018 Appropriation Bill 2017, together with the Consequential Bills for the 2017-2018 Budget, tabled on 29th June 2017; and
- e) time for the debate for the Consequential Bills, including the Accident Compensation Bill 2017, be limited to ensure that all such Bills are debated and voted upon during this sitting on Parliament.



Does any Member oppose the motion?

HON. MEMBERS.- No.

HON. SPEAKER.- There being no opposition, the motion is agreed to unanimously.

Motion agreed to.

### **RESUMPTION OF DEBATE ON THE 2017-2018 APPROPRIATION BILL 2017**

HON. SPEAKER.- We are now on to our second reading and we will continue from where we left off on the Batting Order. I now call upon the Honourable Mataiasi Niumataiwalu to have the floor.

HON. M.A. NIUMATAIWALU.- Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Honourable Prime Minister, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Ministers and Honourable Members of Parliament; I rise to support the FijiFirst Government's National Budget, the 2017-2018 Appropriation Bill 2017.

I take this opportunity to thank the leadership of the FijiFirst Government by the Honourable Prime Minister and the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, that is aiming to make life better for every household in this wonderful nation of ours. The country definitely needs strong, decisive leadership with vision and purpose.

The 2017-2018 Budget, as announced by the Honourable Minister for Economy, is pegged on empowering Fijians to unlock potentials in terms of economic empowerment. It takes advantage of sustained GDP growth, low inflation, high foreign reserves and eight years of economic stability. This, Madam Speaker is a smart budget. It is strategic and targeted, and will benefit the ordinary person. For sustainability sake, the country cannot afford a change in Government.

My primary focus is the vital and timely increase in the budget of the Ministry of Communications. Communications, as we all know, cuts across all borders. This Ministry is responsible for keeping the Fijian people connected to each other and to the outside world by providing efficient, competitive, cost-effective and accessible telecommunication and postal services. The Ministry also manages all ICT systems in the Fijian Government.

Madam Speaker, the Ministry engages with the Fijian public in radio, print and online media to keep the Fijian people updated on Government's plans and policies, and to quickly alert the public to important information. The Ministry comprises the Department of Information, Department of Communications and Information Technology and Computing Services (ITC).

The total Budget for the Ministry of Communications in the 2017-2018 Budget is \$55.4 million; comprising \$22.4 million for Operating expenditure; \$29 million for Capital Expenditure; and VAT of \$3.9 million. The increase of \$17.9 million is mainly attributed to an increase:

1. due to adjustments in salaries and wages associated with the Civil Service Reform;
2. to purchase goods and services that improves service delivery;
3. in capital expenditure for Vanua Levu Cable Connection and Digital Television Rollout;  
and

in special expenditures to host the Asia-Pacific Broadcasting Union (ABU) Meetings. Madam Speaker, \$300,000 is allocated to the ABU meetings from early February 2018.

This is what I call smart investment, Madam Speaker. Many of our broadcasters both, radio and television in the Pacific, are members of ABU so come February next year, the ABU Climate Change and Disaster Risk Reduction and the Pacific Media Partnership Conferences will be held in Nadi. It is expected that over 100 foreign participants, experts and senior media professionals will attend these Meetings.

Madam Speaker, what the country stands to gain from this Summit in terms of exposure to the major broadcast channels in Asia and the Pacific far outweighs our investment of \$300,000. These are the types of initiatives that need Parliament support. The ABU Summit is timely for many reasons. Asia is a viable and lucrative market for Fiji in many aspects. Apart from tourism and trade, we have sports. Japan will host the Rugby World Cup in 2019 and the Olympic Games in 2020.

Another initiative, Madam Speaker, is the \$8 million allocated for the digital television rollout, which will enable access to free-to-air television for the first time to places like Bua, the interior of Ra, Rotuma, the maritime islands, including my province of Lau. I am glad that this is happening under the FijiFirst watch, the expansion of free-to-air television to areas that have been missing out on what the rest of us have been enjoying. This is another very smart move by this Government.

Madam Speaker, we do not want anyone left behind in our quest to better serve this nation.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. M.A. NIUMATAIWALU.- No other government has done what we are doing today.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. M.A. NIUMATAIWALU.- We do not have to go anywhere anymore, we are bringing it home for you, our fellow Fijians.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. M.A. NIUMATAIWALU.- In 1995, we launched Fiji Television, just opposite this Parliament, but it has taken 22 years for places like Bua, the interior of Ra, Rotuma, the maritime islands, including Lau, to benefit from this much needed digital television rollout. Currently, you have to pay to get *Sky TV*, this new rollout means free-to-air service. The same things we watch in Suva, will also be accessed by those areas.

Madam Speaker, there are ongoing initiatives such as, raising public awareness on the services, assistance and other opportunities that are available to the Fijian people through the:

1. \$350,000 that has been allocated to film and video materials. This means the production of new summaries for release to promote broader coverage of Government activities, including the range of the services and assistance that are available to Fijians, and promote greater accessibility to national and international events.
2. Continuation of the liberalisation of the telecommunications market to improve access, affordable and reliable mobile services through cable connection to Vanua Levu. Vanua Levu is so dear to me because this is the Tovata we are talking about.

The World Bank and Government funded the construction of the Suva-Savusavu cable connection via the new Samoa-Fiji Cable to increase broadband capacity and internet connectivity in Vanua Levu. The project is expected to be completed in March, 2018, at a cost of \$17.5 million. This opens up another new frontier for the whole of Vanua Levu.

Madam Speaker, \$5 million was given by the FijiFirst Government and World Bank, \$12.5 million. You can just imagine the accessibility. Our people in Vanua Levu will have increased broadband capacity and internet connectivity. They can just sit in their homes, they do not have to travel to Viti Levu.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. M.A. NIUMATAIWALU.- We have been worried for many years about urban drift, this is another way of reversing the tide.

Implementation of Analogue to Digital Roadmap supports the transition from analogue to digital throughout Fiji by subsidising the purchase of Set Top Boxes (STB) for low-income households; \$2 million is allocated for this.

An Operational Grant of close to \$950,000 is allocated to the Telecommunications Authority of Fiji (TAF), to ensure proper monitoring and regulatory compliance in the ICT Sector.

Madam Speaker, I am so thankful to the allocation of \$300,000 earmarked for the Media Industry Development Authority (MIDA). As the country builds-up to the next general election, it is vital that the media is given due recognition in their contribution to a thriving democracy.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. M.A. NIUMATAIWALU.- I attest to the fact that we are not wrong, but we are doing it differently. I am led to believe that MIDA will be collaborating with the Fijian Elections Office in rolling out training for the media on the Electoral Act, as well as producing the Media Guide to Elections on the role of the media in Elections.

Madam Speaker, last year, round about this time, I stood in this Parliament and said: "Fiji will definitely feature prominently at the Rio Olympics."

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. M.A. NIUMATAIWALU.- We went on to win an Olympic gold in front of 205 nations. Like they say, the rest is history, but I would like to report to this august House that the Fijian currency that commemorates Fiji's historic gold winning performance has a place in the International Olympic Committee (IOC) Museum in Lausanne, Switzerland.

The Oceania National Olympic Committee (ONO) President, Dr. Robin Mitchell, a member of the IOC told me last week that the IOC President, Mr. Thomas Bach, looks forward to the day he will host the Honourable Prime Minister in Lausanne. Hopefully, this year en route to COP23 in Germany, the Honourable Prime Minister will be able to fulfil an invitation the IOC President extended to our leader when they met at the Prime Minister's Office in May 2015. The IOC's support to Fiji's Presidency of COP23 is vital as we continue to punch above our weight in global affairs that affect our very own survival on the local front.

Madam Speaker, let me conclude by congratulating the National Rugby Team and Mr. John McKee for qualifying to the 2019 Rugby World Cup to be held in Japan ...

(Acclamation)

HON. M.A. NIUMATAIWALU.- ... and just like the Olympic gold medal win in Rio last year, I am looking forward to the national team beating Samoa on Saturday.

Madam Speaker, the nation can look forward to a better and brighter Fiji for all Fijians tomorrow under the FijiFirst Government, and I fully support the Bill before the House.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call on the Honourable Assistant Minister for Health and Medical Services to have the floor.

HON. A.D. O'CONNOR.- Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, the Honourable Prime Minister; the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Cabinet Ministers, Honourable Members of Parliament, members of the public in the gallery and those watching this proceedings from the comfort of their homes; a very good morning to you all.

At the outset, Madam Speaker, please allow me to correct the rant and false statements made yesterday by the Honourable Parmod Chand against the Ministry of Health.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. A.D. O'CONNOR.- All scanning machines as we speak are operational, except for the Cath Lab which is under maintenance.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. A.D. O'CONNOR.- When speaking of consumables, there are those that are edible and those that are not.

Our current drug wastage ratio of 3 percent is within the World Health Organisation's average of 5 percent to 6 percent.

May I, at this juncture, Madam Speaker, request the general public and the Opposition to particularly use the MOH Call Centre number 157, for precise and truthful information.

(Chorus of interjections)

Madam Speaker, it is my honour and pleasure to address this august House as the Assistant Minister for Health and Medical Services on the 2017-2018 Budget. I wish to thank the Honourable Prime Minister, Honourable Voreqe Bainimarama; and the Minister for Economy, Honourable Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum, for a comprehensive budget to the Ministry of Health and Medical Services; that includes an increase of over \$77 million, almost a 32 percent increase from the previous year.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. A.D. O'CONNOR.- Since my appointment as Assistant Minister for Health and Medical Services, I have travelled wide within our beautiful island nation and have gained a fair understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of our health system through frank discussions with our local advisors and

leaders, and the communities. In addition, I have inspected almost every remote and isolated health facility in all our Divisions.

In most of the remote and hard-to-reach areas I have visited, I have found our facilities in disrepair and in need of urgent attention. Our own health workers are living and working in a less than ideal situation, and in infrastructure neglected by previous Governments. However, I have observed and am proud to say that our health workers at these remote and isolated stations continue to work diligently...

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order! Let us hear the speaker, please.

HON. A.D. O'CONNOR.- ... conscientiously and remain passionate to the calling, to provide the best healthcare services under trying circumstances. Therefore, an increase in the salary and improvement in the working conditions of our health workers that this Budget provides is greatly welcomed. This support certainly boosts the moral and energise our workers' interaction with their clients and help their families to prosper.

Madam Speaker, as Minister responsible for public health or known as population health in the Ministry of Health and Medical Services, I got to understand of what shapes the health of our people happens outside the doctor's office which is the basis of these public health problems. Public health programmes and strategies focus on ensuring that our people remain well without infirmity, where they live, work, learn and play for a prosperous and productive Fiji.

Madam Speaker, it is encouraging to see a substantial increase in the public health budget. Public health programmes are focused on prevention, promotion of good health and protection that includes strategies that address the Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) crisis, HIV/AIDs, family health, adolescent health, child health, mental health and responding to environmental health risks and emerging communicable diseases. The total budget for public health programmes is \$3,628,000, an increase of \$550,000 from the 2016-2017 fiscal year.

Madam Speaker, I wish to emphasis again, the main points raised by our Minister for Health and Medical Services, the Honourable Rosy Akbar, that substantial investments have been made in the construction and upgrading of hospitals, health centres and nursing stations. Medical services have been decentralised to ensure convenience and easy access for the general public.

We now have more doctors and nurses recruited than ever before in our medical history. Also, they are now better remunerated. The doctor to patient ratio is improving, and funding for supply of essential drugs and consumables has been increased.

Fiji has made significant progress in increasing the overall life expectancy of Fijians, and improving health outcomes. Maternal and infant mortality rates have declined. Primary healthcare is well established with major improvements in secondary healthcare. These progressive improvements is largely attributed to this Government's commitment to annual increases in the health budget, and prudent strategic management of limited resources.

Madam Speaker, the Ministry will shortly be phasing out its fleet of ambulances and replacing them with sophisticated paramedic-outfitted vehicles to be manned by professionally-trained paramedic nurses and drivers, who are prepared to provide high quality care in a variety of situations; from mines and remote locations, workplace and occupational injuries and illnesses, sporting and special event incidents, to inter-facility non-emergency transportation. For paramedic services, clinical excellence involves having the tools, knowledge, judgement, skills and passion to perform at the highest level. These

new paramedic ambulances will be both, 2-wheel drives and 4-wheel drives, the latter being earmarked for maritime and rural health facilities.

Madam Speaker, in its bid to make a commitment to the 2030 Global Sustainable Development Agenda as stated by the Honourable Prime Minister at the United Nations Headquarters on the achievements of SDGs on 21st April this year, the Ministry together with industrial partners, is in the process of carrying out studies and analysis on the conversion of its steam boilers from fossil fuel to tri-generation at its three major hospitals, and co-generation at most sub-divisional hospitals. Consideration has also been given to the conversion of diesel-fuelled incinerators. These strategies add value to fulfilling our commitment to climate change and in making our health system more resilient.

Madam Speaker, the Ministry has embarked on curbing road accidents and mishaps at sea by having drivers and boat handlers alike undergo training and refresher courses for licencing and certification with the Land Transport Authority and the Maritime Safety Authority of Fiji, respectively. Existing facilities, particularly in the maritime area, will undergo urgent repairs and maintenance, inclusive of communication and electrification upgrades. The Ministry will ensure that every health centre is provided with a fulltime doctor or nurse practitioner.

Madam Speaker, the Ministry of Health and Medical Services will also work with our relevant Ministries and focus on rural and informal settlements on safe water, sanitation and waste management. Poor sanitation and hygiene management not only creates an unaesthetic environment but also provides an ideal and conducive breeding ground for mosquitoes carrying diseases, such as dengue fever, Chikungunya and Zika Virus.

As I speak, Madam Speaker, the Ministry is engaged in a pilot project in partnership with an Australian University on an innovative project to control populations of mosquitoes that carry dengue fever, Chikungunya and Zika disease in Fiji. This project is conducted collaboratively with the Biosecurity Authority of Fiji and the Department of Environment.

Madam Speaker, apart from the Government's improving access to healthcare and free medicine, His Excellency had announced in the 2016-2017 Budget, the Government's good intention to review and table the health laws, such as the Public Health Protection Bill.

Madam Speaker, the Ministry greatly supports the budget increase in tax on tobacco, alcohol, sugary additives and carbonated drinks, to encourage healthy food choices. Similarly, the 10 cents plastic levy will add to a cleaner environment.

In conclusion, Madam Speaker, this Budget is truly a budget for the people, a Budget to ensure our people are provided the services they need, a Budget that ensures our family issues and health is addressed and lastly, a Budget that will encourage us to live in wellness and prosperity.

I thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I now call upon the Honourable Balmindar Singh to have the floor.

HON. B. SINGH.- Madam Speaker, the Honourable Prime Minister, the Honourable Leader of Opposition, Honourable Ministers, Honourable Members and members of the public in the gallery, and Fijians who are watching this Budget debate from the comfort of their homes and through livestream; *bula vinaka*.

Madam Speaker, we leaders, have a patriotic duty to realise the agricultural sector by tapping into its potential and increase its importance, vis-a-vis enhancing food security, improving the livelihoods by promoting investments in livestock and boosting economic growth. The 2017-2018 Budget provides a perfect vehicle for united action precisely across the socio-economic and political spectrum.

Madam Speaker, we, on this side of the House continue to inspire growth and reinstate confidence for the people of this dear land, and for this, I join with the rest of my colleagues in congratulating the Honourable Minister for Economy for a Budget well received by Fijians in all spectrum.

Madam Speaker, agriculture continues to contribute 8.2 percent of Fiji's GDP. I must add that agriculture has received over \$86.3 million in the 2017-2018 Budget, and this remains one of the largest budgets for this sector, highlighting Government's commitment to agriculture and the persons involved therein.

Agriculture remains a priority area for the Bainimarama-led Government in addressing problems of unemployment, poverty alleviation and fostering economic development. Significantly, the FijiFirst Government is focusing primarily on sustainable food security, increasing productivity, expanding commercial agriculture, import substitution and income diversification.

Madam Speaker, in 2017-2018, we will continue production transformation through agricultural diversification, improvement in drainage and irrigation systems, improvements in extension research, extension and marketing, strengthening our regulatory framework governing issues pertinent to organic farming methodology and groundwater management.

Madam Speaker, the FijiFirst Government will be pursuing interventions that will ensure food security for all, specifically, access to safe food throughout the country, with a view to maintaining a healthy and productive population by the implementation of the Fiji 2020 Agriculture Policy Agenda. It is expected that the Policy will boost the economy and encourage private sector investment and confidence.

Madam Speaker, because agricultural diversification is so fundamental to the wellbeing of the green economy transition, I would like to spend my remaining time talking about what it will take to achieve these developmental advances and share their benefits.

On livestock development, Madam Speaker, the Livestock Extension Services has been allocated \$0.8 million in the 2017-2018 Budget. Positive growth will continue in 2017-2018.

As an integral part of the Livestock Development Programme, Government has allocated funds for Livestock Research and Development. This initiative will improve nutrition for all Fijians through increased production of both, meat and eggs.

Agriculture Marketing Authority (AMA), Madam Speaker, is taking value addition to another level. Improvement in the livelihood of our people remains a thrust for the FijiFirst Government as we are advancing the cause of market access approach to value-added production and productivity from rural farmers. AMA will continue to create an enabling environment for the promotion, development, utilisation and exportation of agricultural commodities. In light of this, Government has allocated \$5.6 million to enable AMA to support the marketing of agriculture commodities for farmers in rural areas.

Madam Speaker, in respect of improve production and productivity in our agricultural sector, the FijiFirst Government is introducing smart agricultural irrigation solutions. In view of this, the Bainimarama-led Government has established a new Ministry of Waterways to address the growing

threat in flooding due to the effects of climate change. Therefore, the Ministry is responsible for the maintenance of drainage system and management of waterways around Fiji.

Madam Speaker, the Ministry is mandated to improve storm-water management, mitigate flooding and improve the irrigation system.

Madam Speaker, given the critical nature of our water resources to agriculture and other sectors, great importance must be placed on water planning, development and management. Taking due cognizance of the effects of global warming on rainfall patterns and sea level rise, we recognise that our systems must be improved. The objective of executing capital works in the medium term would, therefore, be to improve drainage and irrigation system, which would contribute to the long-term aim of achieving a high capacity drainage and irrigation system that actively contributes to improved agricultural productivity and reduced incidences of flooding.

A holistic approach is necessary for proper management on both, technical and managerial level. Therefore, in light of this, the Bainimarama-led Government has allocated a total budget of \$24.2 million for the Ministry of Waterways in the 2017-2018 Budget. To this end, the FijiFirst Government will work to address the fundamental issues that are putting Fijian communities at risk by developing more-effective flood management systems, introducing smart agricultural irrigation solutions, dredging waterways and developing modern drainage guidelines and regulations.

Before I conclude, Madam Speaker, allow me to quote from Barry Commoner, who said and I quote:

“If you ask what you are going to do about global warming, the only rational answer is to change the way in which we do transportation, energy production, agriculture and a good deal of manufacturing. The problem originates in human activity in the form of the production of goods throughout the value chain.”

Therefore, Madam Speaker, agriculture is our wisest pursuit because it will, in the end, contribute mostly to the country's health and wealth, good moral and community happiness.

In closing, Madam Speaker, I commend this Budget to the House with the acronym SMART, meaning Sustainable, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Tangible. Thank you, very much.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now give the floor to the Honourable Howard Politini.

HON. H.R.T. POLITINI.- Madam Speaker, the Honourable Prime Minister, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Cabinet Ministers and Honourable Members of Parliament; the 2017-2018 National Budget addresses a number of issues relating to the tourism industry, an industry that is critical to the economic wellbeing of our nation and is important in many areas, particularly the employment of Fijians, the contribution of foreign exchange, the spreading of the sources of foreign income to mitigate against trading risks, and the development of a sound investment segment for Fijian businesses.

In the last seven years, the tourism industry has enjoyed strong and continuous growth, even last year when disruption related to *TC Winston* could have been expected to seriously impact the growth of the industry. In fact, it did for a short time but like the rest of the country which also suffered under the impact of the largest weather event ever experienced in the South Pacific, tourism recovery was fast and industry determination helped drive tourism to even greater heights.

As the largest industry in the country and the largest employer of Fijians, tourism is critical to the wellbeing and lifestyle of a large segment our Fijian population. Last year, the tourism industry



contributed around 29 percent of our GDP, a significant amount in itself, but not the only significant thing about the industry.

Madam Speaker, in the 2017-2018 National Budget which we are discussing today, after careful analysis of the industry, the current trends and a number of things that will affect the industry and extensive discussions with tourism stakeholders at all levels, our Government has budgeted a total of \$58.4 million which is an increase of \$20.6 million from the previous budgeted amount of \$37.8 million. While this may appear to be a significant increase and it is, indeed, generous, the tourism industry has grown so much over the last year that it is easy to justify such an increase.

Of the total amount of \$58.4 million, \$33.1 million is specifically allocated to Tourism Fiji, the body tasked with promoting and developing tourism interests in all our international source markets globally. This is an increase year on year of, of \$5.5 million. This budget allocation was made to ensure that the growth of last year could be secured and that further expected growth can indeed be achieved.

In the last two or three years, there has been a basic structural change in the ownership of hotels and resorts in Fiji. In the past, a large number of major hotels and resort properties were owned and operated by overseas companies. This meant that often decisions were made by executives not resident in Fiji, decisions that would affect the basic foundation of the tourism industry.

It also meant that a large part of the income earned by creative use of Fiji's amazing location and pristine environment and our most important and unique tourism asset, our people, was sent offshore. So amazing are our people, Madam Speaker, and so important to our tourism industry, that our message all around the world is "Fiji, where happiness finds you" and the Bainimarama Government has strategies in place to ensure that Fijians benefit more from the tourism industry than in the past.

Over the last 12 months to 18 months, there has been a big change in the ownership of the hotels and resorts in Fiji, particularly in the upper end of the market, as Fiji owned companies move strongly into the ownership of these assets. These companies are now in the position to be able to bring a strong Fiji presence to the boardroom and to view strategic decisions from a Fiji point of view. They also retain a significant amount of the earned funds in Fiji, where in previous years they were repatriated to the owner's homeland.

For that reason, the FijiFirst Government believes that added support is in the national interest because now, a significantly higher percentage of the tourism income directly benefits Fijians. That is not the only reason, we believe that the allocation in the budget, and particularly the amount of the increased allocation directed to Tourism Fiji to strengthen our presence in the most important tourism source markets, is a very worthwhile and constructive investment.

Over the last two years, there has been an incredible surge in new construction of resorts and hotels. Some quite large hotels and resorts are planned, bringing new famous international brands into the local market and a number of these are ready to commence operations. These are well known and respected international brands, but the actual property remains in the hands of local investors, again increasing the actual return to the Fiji economy, providing even more employment opportunities for Fiji workers and the possibility for Fijian executives to join the international hotel management company and follow an international career path.

But for Fijians to fully take advantage of the many opportunities, they will need formal industry specific education. Recognising this, the Bainimarama Government has changed the rules of the Tertiary Education Loans Scheme or TELS, to make it more flexible and easier to access for people who are already employed in all levels of the tourism and hospitality industry.

Because of the large number of additional hotels and resorts in the Fiji market now, there is a clear need to create an increase in the number of visitor arrivals to fill the added room capacity. Again, Tourism Fiji will be required to be at the forefront of these critical marketing efforts. The increase in hotel and resort numbers will also allow good growth in the Meeting, Incentive, Conference and Exhibition niche market, commonly referred to as the MICE market, which has good potential but has been restrained due to the lack of sufficient venues over the previous months. But several of the new resorts properties now have large convention centres which have a seating capacity of over a thousand participants at any one time.

Madam Speaker, the Bainimarama Government has consistently supported the tourism industry through budget allocations to assist with the necessary task of marketing Fiji in our source markets and through a number of targeted initiatives, such as Sports Tourism of international standards, such as the Fiji International Golf Tournament at Nadaloa, Super Rugby Matches here in Suva, International Surfing Association Competition at Namotu and Tavarua's cloud break last year, and in 10 months' time from 24th May to 27th May, 2018, the Hash House Harriers or H3, will be celebrating their 21st anniversary with over 5,000 participants and their families gracing our shores with a cross-country run event in the highlands of Nadi. These events, Madam Speaker, provided huge media coverage, especially television, and exposed our beautiful country around the world.

Through this consistency and level of support, an attitude was created throughout the tourism industry that Government action had underpinned the growth and that tourism in Fiji was a secure and exciting business investment. This is why there has been such a marked growth in the range and quality of the infrastructure, particularly the construction of hotels and resorts, and the renovation and expansion of existing properties.

Indeed, only two years ago, a new integrated tourism resort, Denarau Waters, was started on the undeveloped half of Denarau Island. When completed, this project will more than double the tourism infrastructure currently on Denarau, and is located in the heart of the Fiji's tourism area. Denarau Waters is the largest tourism development in the South Pacific and represents a commitment of over hundreds of millions of dollars, providing a good level of employment right now in its construction phases, and huge number of jobs in the hotels, resorts and mariner once completed.

Without the belief and the support of the Bainimarama-led Government in maintaining a strong tourism industry, this development and many others like it, would not have taken place. Denarau Waters will have a number of hotels and resorts and already, over \$130 million in land sales have been completed. There are many other examples of the impact of this investor confidence created by our consistent support for the marketing of Fiji tourism and Fiji is unquestionably the most developed tourism destination in the South Pacific. There is also no sign of the growth and development slowing down in the foreseeable future.

The Bainimarama-led Government, Madam Speaker, is determined to spread the tourism dollar right around Fiji, so that as many people as possible are able to benefit from our leading industry and to assist with the marketing of smaller properties. The allocation for tourism made in the National Budget will assist in doing this. There has also been a great deal of investment in a number of products, offering tourists unique and high quality experiences using the remarkable pristine Fiji environment. Most of these are locally funded, and all provide employment and a career opportunities for our people. The run-on effect of tourism dollars entering Fiji is widespread and the industry has a place in the lives of almost every Fijian family in some way.

Madam Speaker, in developing the National Budget, many priorities had to be addressed and the Bainimarama-led Government has carefully reviewed all the needs and allocated the available funds accordingly. Past experience has shown us that Tourism Fiji is very creative in the use of allocated funds

and managed to significantly increase the impact of their marketing activity in the source markets through creative communication strategies, drawing more visitors for each dollar invested than most of our competitive destinations.

Many of these other tourist destinations, Madam Speaker, have larger promotional budgets than Fiji can commit, but as with most things Fijian, we are constantly punching above our weight. Tourism Fiji is actively backed by our industry partners, particularly by our national airline, Fiji Airways, and major hotels and resorts, so that a unified message reaches our target markets across the globe.

Madam Speaker, it is with great pride and a sense of certainty that the future of Fiji tourism, our largest and fastest growing industry, will continue to enjoy the success it has achieved over the past years, and that the 2017-2018 National Budget allocation will be well used to ensure that the success trend continues to ascend to greater heights.

Madam Speaker, I, therefore, fully support the 2017-2018 Appropriation Bill, tabled in this august House by the Honourable Attorney-General and Honourable Minister for Economy.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now give the floor to the Honourable Professor Birman Prasad.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Madam Speaker, as I listened to the Budget speech on 29th June, 2017, and the contributions from the Government side, I kept coming back to one thought, that after the Government changes next year, how much work there are you going to do?

(Laughter)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- The Honourable Minister promised us a short speech, instead he gave us about an hour and a half monologue on how fantastic the Fiji economy was. In fact, the Honourable Prime Minister weighed in as well yesterday, so let me begin by talking about that.

The Honourable Minister talked about the size of the economy, he talked about the continuous economic growth, and he talked about foreign reserve. But, Madam Speaker, let us remember what he did not talk about. He skipped over the rising tide of Government debt, now over \$5 billion, and one way or another these debts are to be paid by both, our current generation as well as future generations.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- More tax revenue will be needed to pay the interest on the debt. Just from the Estimates, Madam Speaker, total debt servicing in the year 2015-2016 was almost a billion dollars - \$992 million. In 2017-2018, against a revenue of \$3.8 billion, you have \$525 million debt servicing. It is not something that we can ignore, Madam Speaker, because that means we have to constantly find more revenue which means more tax, which means more burden to the people.

Interestingly, Madam Speaker, the Honourable Minister also did not talk about the jobs in the economy because the Government has nothing much to report, and he did not talk about why the income of Fiji's poorest people have not improved. So, Madam Speaker, these are some of the things I want to talk about in my Budget response today.

Madam Speaker, I also want to talk about the broad economic policy areas which the NFP, if it comes to Government, will drive change. The vision for the Fijian economy, Madam Speaker, it was quite hilarious that the Government suddenly discovered after 10 years in the job that the Budget is a

strategic exercise, not just year by year allocation of Government and taxpayers' funds, but you need a strategy and we are asking; what is your strategy for the economy? The Government seems to be making it up as it goes along.

Last year's slogan was green growth, now what we are all hearing about is climate adaptation. All that is very good, we have no problems with that. And while the Honourable Prime Minister travels around the world giving speeches about it, the global economy, Madam Speaker, continues to develop further. There are many other areas in which it is growing.

Madam Speaker, the Government has effectively presided over an economy built on tourism, built on government spending and overseas remittances. This is an economic vision that requires actually zero imagination. Tourism is an established industry, and it grows by itself. It is true that the Government gives it money for marketing, but if you look at the 25 percent tax, it is really just a fraction of what the amount is. In fact, in some ways that tax itself, Madam Speaker, is making Fiji an uncompetitive tourism destination. This explains why Government's ambitious targets of tourism numbers have not been met.

The Government's next idea to grow the economy, Madam Speaker, is to give away taxes, such as income tax, VAT, et cetera. It is very good to raise the income threshold for income tax, but if you do not earn more than \$16,000 in income, this is no really help to you.

Finally, Madam Speaker, we have overseas remittances. Our people are using their skills to grow other countries' economies. They send back their wages and salaries to Fiji. What Fiji citizens need, Madam Speaker, is a government with a strong and long term vision. We need to know what the Government understands, we need to know that the Government actually understands how the world economy works. They need to understand how Fiji will take opportunities from the global economy, they also need to know that the Government is listening to the idea, the people must know that the Government is actually listening to their ideas and willing to be criticised.

Madam Speaker, one of the first things that the NFP will do in Government is to bring back the annual National Economic Summit. This will be a two or three day annual meeting with all its sectors of the economy, including businesses, the unions, social and community organisations, resources owners and representatives of the poor, so they are able to communicate freely not, just with the Government but also with each other. Working together we can share ideas and create strategies and opportunities. The National Economic Summit will have a full time secretariat which will continue to work with the stakeholders throughout the year to implement the idea that have been created and the strategies that have been shared.

Right now, Madam Speaker, Government's economic consultations are actually carefully statements. It is usually reported by the *Fiji Sun* with pictures of Ministers all over the place and sometimes only the locations also change.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- The Government's latest brain wave has been to consult high school students, obviously in a bid to first time voters; that is fine. But the point is, all the economic consultations are fed through Government and come back out through Government.

This Government, Madam Speaker, in my view is obsessed with controlling every dialogue and every idea. We want the stakeholders in the Fiji economy to work with each other. Government must play its role in creating the right economic political climate for investment. It must build infrastructure, it must regulate sensibly and sensitively, but it must then get out of the way and let the people of Fiji work with each other.

Madam Speaker, opportunities are in abundance, for example, if you look at the demand for timber, which has been increasing. We have a vast land area for forestry, but we are still importing wood for construction. So these are areas where we need to look at in terms of new ideas, Madam Speaker.

The demand for food worldwide is increasing, Madam Speaker, and the question we have to ask is, why have we not been able to attract some big agricultural investors into the economy? Our people have a strong advantage over many other countries. We are educated, English is our language which is becoming a global language, and we shut off the tax incentive for example, Madam Speaker, to have call centres in 2009, and yet if you look at the statistics, the call centre industry employs fewer than 2,000 people. So it has taken a while for us to get there.

Madam Speaker, I agree with the Honourable Minister for Trade when he said that young people want to get into business and become entrepreneurs; that is true. Fewer people will work in wage employment, we understand that. More and more people will work for themselves and in small and medium enterprises, Madam Speaker.

In particular, Madam Speaker, this is a way in which many of our young people will use the technology, use the knowledge around the world and deal with their peers and pick up ideas and do things.

But what they need, Madam Speaker, is very simple, uncomplicated tools for getting into business. They do not want to waste their time going through all the bureaucracies, filling forms and all the rest of it. Government's vision, Madam Speaker, for small and medium enterprises is really a joke when you look at all these restrictions.

Fiji's World Bank ranking for starting a business is 155 out of 189.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBERS.- (Inaudible interjections)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- A few months ago the Honourable Minister for Industry, Trade and Tourism said the Government was going to address this. In fact, Madam Speaker, he almost suggested that this pathetic ranking was not the Government's fault. It was all the fault of lawyers and accountants who were deliberately slowing down things to make money for themselves.

Madam Speaker, it has become a habit of this Government to blame everyone else. The Honourable Minister for Trade again reportedly blaming professional people for slowing down investment. The Honourable Minister of Economy, the other day, labelled supermarket owners and distributors as bandits. The Honourable Minister for Health even blamed people for being sick. The Honourable Minister for Education used to blame teachers for poor quality. I mean this is a very clear sign, Madam Speaker, that this is a Government that is out of ideas and there is no vision. The other issue, Madam Speaker that has been lauded by speakers from the Government side is about delivery but all that has been glossed over because if you look at the real problem with this Government, it is actually the delivery of their promises.

And my question is, if you cannot deliver then do not promise. Every year the budget promises fantastic things; new roads, schools, healthcare upgrades, welfare payments and the list goes on and we see Honourable Ministers travelling around the country closely followed by *Fiji Sun*, of course, to be photographed alongside new water supplies, solar panels and the rest of it. But the facts as the Honourable Minister for Economy himself confessed that the Government cannot do the work that it has promised all the time. And that is a good confession; honest confession.

What did the Honourable Minister tell us that last year's projected budget deficit of 4.7 percent of GDP will only be 2 percent? This is because there are unforeseen delays in the implementation, this is

what the Honourable Minister said, "... unforeseen delays in implementation was on the capital projects as a result of bad weather, shortage of materials and non-availability of construction companies."

In other words we did not deliver, yes.

(Laughter)

This is a Government, Madam Speaker, which cannot plan around a bad weather. This is a Government which does not have a plan to build projects around bad weather.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- It cannot plan ahead to get the building materials it needs and it blames construction companies for not being available. If you cannot plan these things properly, Madam Speaker, why promise them at all, why promise them.

HON. GOVT. MEMBER.- (Inaudible)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Madam Speaker, ask the victims of *Cyclone Winston* how well this Government has delivered; ask them. The disaster's Help for Homes Initiatives has done nothing except waste tens of millions dollars of taxpayer's money, enrich some of the hardware companies and shatter people's hopes; people who waited for materials to arrive and when they arrived, sometimes the cement arrived, the timber did not arrive. By the time the timber arrived, the cement had gone bad.

(Laughter)

This is the reality, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, let me give you another example of the delivery. A few weeks ago the Chief Executive of the Fiji Roads Authority suddenly resigned. His resignation as was announced was for personal reasons. Only a few days ago he told *Pacific Beat - ABC* that the Government and FRA board had and I quote "unrealistic expectations about how to repair Fiji's transport infrastructure" and the story goes on. Fiji has suffered from trying to initiate cosmetics quick fix solutions but the roads cannot be fixed properly without a long term sustainable plan.

These are examples, Madam Speaker, where public money is recklessly being allocated and recklessly being spent.

Cost of living and raising income, Madam Speaker.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBER.- Tell them.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Madam Speaker, if you read the newspapers, you will talk to the people, you will hear that the cost of living is one of the key concerns. Government, however, says, "This is all wrong". They tell us that it is the fault of politicians when we talk about cost of living for politicising the issue, and greedy supermarket owners who are charging too much; these are the reasons we get.

Madam Speaker, it is not just the cost of living, it is that incomes have not risen, particularly for the poorest people in our country and we need to understand that it is not just the cost of living, it is the income that has not risen. If the Government actually thinks that increasing social welfare allowances, social pension allowances, subsidise bus fares, raising the tax threshold will solve this problem, it is not

going to be helpful in the long term, Madam Speaker. I will give you an example, the Government has increased the tax threshold from \$16,000 to \$30,000.

In some way, Madam Speaker this was not well thought out because what it does, it actually puts in a rough calculation of about \$266 a month. For us as well, people like Members of Parliament and Ministers who are earning more than \$30,000 so in fact a better option would have been to give rebate directly to those earning between \$16,000 to \$30,000. We are going to get more money. We do not need that. People earning above \$30,000 ....

HON. GOVT. MEMBER.- (Inaudible interjection)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- That is a fact, Madam Speaker. We are going to get more in our pockets as well, not just people between \$16,000 to \$30,000.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- So this is the way in which the taxation policy have been enacted.

The other issue, Madam Speaker, is about minimum wage. Raising it to \$2.68 is actually a joke.

Madam Speaker, when we suggested a higher minimum wage rate or when we suggested a living wage, we were being criticised. We believe that this must be introduced in consultation with employers and other stakeholders and that must be the target, Madam Speaker, and that would be our target. We will work towards a living wage, a living wage that is commensurate with the cost of living. Let me come back to, Madam Speaker, on the Civil Service Reforms very quickly.

Madam Speaker, the Civil Service pay rise, let me just speak on ....

HON. SPEAKER.- You may pause, we will give you extra time.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Let me just come back on the Civil Service wage rise, Madam Speaker. In fact, 14.3 percent average pay rise for civil servants equates to about 1.43 percent each for the last 10 years. So it is a catching-up exercise, but let me just talk about this contract, Madam Speaker.

A memorandum from the Ministry of Education clearly states that teachers whose employment is permanent will not get the pay rise if they do not sign the contract. I consider this actually blackmail it is holding a civil servant to ransom. Let me just give you, Madam Speaker, very quickly, I have a copy of the contract dated 4<sup>th</sup> July, 2017.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, it is difficult for me to control the noise because a lot of noise is coming your own colleagues.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Some of these provisions are as follows:

1. Renewal of the contract is at the absolute discretion of the Government.
2. Civil servant irrevocably agrees that non-renewal of the contract will not give rise to any course of action whatsoever against the Government.

3. The duration of the contract expires immediately upon a civil servant reaching the retirement age of 55.
4. Renewal of the contract is subject to Government requiring the services of the civil servant and that too if he or she agrees to enter into another contract on mutually agreed terms, the decision of the Government to transfer a civil servant on the existing terms under contract anywhere in Fiji is final.
5. Government has the right to change or vary the contract at any time.

Madam Speaker, these are not the type of contracts that will instil confidence in the Civil Service.

Sugar industry, Madam Speaker, a lot has been said. Let me just very quickly say that we have better information and let me just say that the *Fiji Times* articles on the plight of the farmers was very interesting. It reminded the rest of us of the importance of the industry, the mess that it is in, and most importantly the farmers and their families have human faces and human problems. They and their families are not just thousands of faceless people, so really the Government has continuously denied that it is their responsibility. They are responsible for the demise of the sugar industry and the state in which the industry is in today, and the solutions that they are coming up with are not going to turn that around.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- Sit down!

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- I still have time.

Our vision for the economy, Madam Speaker. I regret this year that I only have 20 minutes to speak and I am sure the Government is actually relieved about that, but they should not rest too comfortably, so I want to be clear about NFP's vision for the economy. This is what we want.

Firstly, we will renew and invigorate the National Economic Summit process, as I have said. We will slash the red tape and simplify the rules and regulations for all investors, whether they are large foreign corporations or young people who wish to market, for example, we will simplify the tax system and ensure that it is attractive to foreign and local investors and that people spend less time worrying about whether they had met all the rules and regulations. We will hold nation-wide consultations on the issues that are vital for Fiji going forward; land-use, education, sugar industry, health and housing. This will be the focus of the NFP Government, Madam Speaker.

We, in the NFP, will have a lot to say about these things in the coming weeks and months so the people of Fiji, we say, "Enjoy the benefits that the Government has given you. After all, it is your money they are spending but better government, better economic management is coming. Change is coming."

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Members, we will now suspend Parliament for refreshments and resume at 11.30 a.m.

The Parliament adjourned at 11.00 a.m.



The Parliament resumed at 11.31 a.m.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I now call upon the Honourable Salote Radrodro to have the floor.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- I thank you, Madam Speaker. The Honourable Prime Minister, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Members, I take this opportunity to respond to the 2017-2018 Budget.

First of all, a big thank you and *vinaka vakalevu* to all the civil servants for working so hard in putting this Budget together. My response will basically cover a broader overview; secondly, the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation; and thirdly, the Ministry of Civil Service.

Madam Speaker, let me begin and echo *Proverbs 16:8* which says: "Better is a little with righteousness than great revenues with injustice."

To those watching television and listening to the radio, please, listen carefully and remember this, that this FijiFirst Government has lost its way and this 2017-2018 Budget will drag Fiji further down the road of disaster and chaos. As such, Madam Speaker, I do not support this Budget.

Madam Speaker, I urge the citizens of this nation, including those sitting on the opposite side to stand up and be counted before it is too late. Madam Speaker, this Budget aims to make people feel good but there will be great disappointment when reality kicks in and as they say, "The devil is in the details" and all those nasties will appear when policies are being implemented to actualise these promises and we must remember that nothing is free except for the air that we breathe, *o keda ga na lewe ni vanua eda na sauma*.

Working and staying at home or in villages, or even beggars on the streets, we all pay taxes, especially the 9 percent VAT and I must say, Madam Speaker, that the Fiji people are much wiser today than the Government thinks.

Madam Speaker, on the development plans, this Government has failed to produce the five-year and the 20-year development plans so we ask, "Where is this Budget being based?" We heard yesterday that this is a forward-looking budget, that it is a visionary budget but without a plan, how can you say that? Even this plan does not have a theme, they have ran out of themes, Madam Speaker. First they started with "Turning Promises into Deeds", promises never actualised, promises were never achieved so now they just kept quiet, no theme.

So Madam Speaker with this elections budget, the Government has tried to numb the people with numbers, fool them with lyrics that seems to be the concept upon which this budget is predicated. Furthermore, Madam Speaker, this Government is most dictatorial, careless and inhumane.

Dictatorial because political power is concentrated only in the hands of two people. Who individually holds more than three ministerial portfolios and I believe, Madam Speaker, they control more than 50 percent of the budget of the nation. Madam Speaker, history has proven that leaders with so much political power will be forced someday, sooner or later, to give way to common sense and the will of the people.

Madam Speaker the Government has been careless and irresponsible. Look at the poor quality of our roads which goes under maintenance soon after the millions of dollars had been poured in and what is even more painful is that most of that money flies out of the country because the companies engaged with our road works, are from where? From overseas.

Madam Speaker, this arrangement further pushed our Public Works Department (PWD) workers into unemployment and pushed affected people, affected families into hardship and poverty. Madam Speaker, the Government has failed to address our basic needs. It has not empowered our people, has not ensured anyone's survival except the Government Ministers and their cronies, and it is very obvious that we will not be moving forward after this elections budget.

Madam Speaker, the Government is also anti-people and especially the poor. A huge number of our population had been left behind, still trapped in the jaws of poverty particularly those who lost their homes during *TC Winston*. They are still in incomplete houses, they are still in tents because the cash grant assistance of \$7,000 is just simply too small. And I ask the Ministers responsible, can you build a house with \$7,000 compliant with the Government Building Standards that you have been talking about? Of course not. So why did the Government do that? Do they really care about the people of this nation? I will leave that for the people to answer themselves.

Madam Speaker, this Government boasts doubling of our Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The GDP growth in itself is an unreliable indicator in our circumstances and certainly should not be given as evidence of overall development. SODELPA and the women of Fiji are concerned about growth and development because without development growth is not sustainable, and it is the real development indicators that truly determine the sustainability of economic growth. Not the manipulation of statistics, purely to bring fleeting comfort to the listeners.

So, Madam Speaker, we ask the question given the GDP, can our people afford housing? Can our people afford to buy food? Do they have secure jobs? Can they access reliable public healthcare? Can they trust the justice system? Are they safe? Madam Speaker, I believe the answer to all those is a big fat No! No! No!

Madam Speaker, on the expected total Government budgeted debt which says is \$5.2 billion, if we take the Government's contingent liability of around \$1.5 billion, this brings it to a total debt level of \$6.7 billion. Instead we are only hearing \$5.2 billion. So all these \$6.7 billion will be paid by taxpayers. What would be the percentage of GDP of the \$6.7 billion debt level?

Madam Speaker, now we also see the Whole of Government Financial Audit Report and we question Government. When will the updated Audit Report for Government companies be presented in this House, especially where Government is giving guarantees - FSC?

Madam Speaker, moving onto Climate Change. A lot has been said about Climate Change and COP23 including the new environment tax of 10 cents on plastic bags which everyone pays. But, Madam Speaker the biggest concern here is the problem of improper waste disposal which still remains a big threat to our environment and it would do a lot of good for Fiji that we first act locally before going globally.

Proper waste management was something I highlighted in this House in my maiden speech and I continue to highlight in this House, but nothing or very little has been done by the Honourable Minister or Ministry responsible. The Local Government Act still has not been reviewed, the Local Government Elections still not conducted, areas like Tacirua Heights still waiting for the white goods disposal arrangement and informal communities in Tacirua, Tovata, Laqere, Kalabu, Khalsa Road and many more still do not have proper waste disposal, and until and unless these problems are resolved, our environment still remains under wraps and the Honourable Minister Koroilavesau's efforts in trying to clean up our shorelines will still be a big problem.

Madam Speaker, there was an allocation of \$2 million in 2016 for a Waste Transfer Station in the Central Division but up until now, nothing has eventuated. May I remind the Honourable Minister that

the people of Laqere are not opposed to the project or to the idea, they are opposed to the location. Location! Location! Location! Honourable Minister, take it somewhere else.

Madam Speaker, where is the people centred focussed in this Budget. There are many reasons why under this FijiFirst Government we have been witnessing a slide in all governance and human development indicators. Principal among them is the failure of this Government to recognise the true nature of democracy and the only faithful way to deliver in democratic spirit.

Madam Speaker, the true nature of democracy lies in the critical link between politics and service. Time and time again we have seen the Government oscillates between two equally inadequate methodologies. They see the State as either an omnipotent centripetal force where the State decides and does everything with reference to the people or they perceive the condition as a demonstration of the power of market forces and allow those forces to take charge of the situation to the peril of the people.

The FijiFirst Government either put the State in the centre or the market forces in the centre but never the people. Never the people in making for a fundamental flow in each such processes. But Madam Speaker, the vision of SODELPA has always been and remains that putting people first. We are all about people and that is true democracy something that this FijiFirst Government knows nothing about.

Government views with disdain any protest from the people and consequentially fails to take notice of the concerns and objections raised by the people prior to entering into a dubious agreement with an industry. For example, take the case Shirley Park in Lautoka. Madam Speaker, at every turn this Government adopts a top-down approach even for the most sensitive of issues namely the 2013 Constitution. Look at the way this Government's irresponsible governance in forcing the 2013 Constitution upon the people of Fiji and then comes up with a Constitution Public Holiday and naming a street just outside this building to try and force the people into acceptance.

Madam Speaker, in true genuine democracy public protest is an effective way to embarrass Government into some kind of response. But in Fiji public protest is controlled by the Government Public Order Act. Ask Jope, the leader of SODLEPA Youth who was removed by the Police from the street for his individual peaceful protest in support of UN Remembrance Day of those that had been tortured and even died in the hands of Police custody. But, Madam Speaker let us never forget that the voice of the people is the voice of God and the people will not be silenced.

Madam Speaker, moving on to casino, have the people been consulted? Are they ready for this type of development? People have raised their concerns and reservations against the casino business as was the case in the previous casino project. Our youths are victims of high unemployment rate, high activity of criminal activities, increase in the use of marijuana and even hard drugs like cocaine, which is easily accessible in the streets.

These are symptoms of moral decline, symptoms of social decay ...

HON. MEMBER.- (Inaudible interjection)

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- ... and this casino business will only further aggravate our social problems and financial burdens. So, Madam Speaker, these again demonstrate the Government's bulldozing tactics of giving precedence to economic growth over the voices of the people.

Madam Speaker, having people at the centre of policy formulation and implementation is simply the best workable option. Our people are smart, innovative and accommodating. Consulting them is the counter-guarantee against failures. This Government clearly does not understand that it is the centrality

of people in the state of affairs that makes good the affairs of the state. This is why they are incapable of empowering the people themselves as the central strategy for sustainable economic development.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Madam Speaker, the people of Fiji are not fools. They know that this FijiFirst Government has caused the inflationary spiral which has robbed them of their value of incomes. They know that the promises are never kept. They know that the poor and the working poor had been have been made worst off and that neither this Budget nor the ones before have offered any solution.

And, Madam Speaker, during this Budget response time, Government Ministers boast about their accomplishments, but the public know their failures. People are still living in tents; rural secondary schools are not accessible to electricity, thereby these secondary schools do not have computer laboratories.

Traffic jams are worse off. People have to trace high food prices. We have to pay for private treatment as the health sector crumbles and we have to hide behind burglar proof houses in fear of the criminals. There is no hope under this Government nor any new solutions.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- More and more people are recognising this and realise that as long as this FijiFirst Government is in control, our standard of living will continue to fall and our children will have no real future.

Madam Speaker, moving on to mobile phones. There is a claim that there are more mobile phone SIM cards than actual people, but Madam Speaker, that will only ring true if the Honourable Minister for Economy gets Vodafone to repair the tower, which went down during *TC Winston* and is still down so that communication in the Tikina of Mualevu and surrounding islands in Vanua Balavu can be resolved.

Madam Speaker, on our health system, our healthcare system is collapsing. The newspaper carry healthcare problems almost on daily basis. And apart from that, Madam Minister, how many of you sitting that side have ever visited the Maternity Unit at CWM recently?

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Are you sure?

Thank you, Madam Speaker. I think you must have gone with a blindfold.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Madam Speaker, the CWM extension of the Maternity Unit was given \$1.3 million in 2016; \$3 million in 2016 to 2017; and \$9.5 million in the 2017-2018 Budget.

But Madam Speaker, you go there but you do not see any work or any improvement done. So the question is, where is all this money being directed to? Likewise, the new Nausori Hospital.

In 2016, \$2 million was allocated there but nothing actualised and that project does not appear in this Budget anymore. So maybe that Nausori Hospital has gone out the window.

Madam Speaker, the trend is the same in other ministries. For example, new town development in Nabouwalu in Bua; \$1.9 million was allocated in 2016; \$1 million in 2017-2018 and \$5.6 million in 2017 to 2018. but nothing has actualised in there. Nothing happened, even the Government's station, right next to the market, went down after *TC Winston* and still nothing has been done about it.

And Madam Speaker, may I ask people watching TV, listening to the radio and also in this House, what do we call a government that continues to make false promises? And what can we do to make the change?

Madam Speaker, let us move on to the Children, Women and Poverty Alleviation. On the Poverty Alleviation, we have heard that there is a good increase in allowance and people are thankful for that, but let me put poverty into context.

Poverty Benefit of \$35, plus \$50 food voucher is equal to \$85 a month, and that is about \$2.83 a day. Child Protection Scheme is \$69 a month and that is \$2.30 a day. And all that, the Government is doing, helping the poor to live at about \$2 a day.

But then, look at the Ministers? For a base salary of \$200,000, a Minister earns about \$555 a day and if perks are included, it will go to about a \$1000 or even more. And if on duty travel, it would be even more and more and more. But, Madam Speaker, I would have given an accurate calculation if Ministers' salaries were available in the ministerial payroll, but it is being managed by a private sector, a private firm, we do not know how much that firm is being paid. So, Madam Speaker, let us look at the Women...

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Point of Order, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, the Honourable Radrodro has said that the Minister's salaries are being managed by a private firm. Can she please tell us which private firm because I can tell this House, Madam Speaker as she would know, it is provided in the Estimates, it is managed through the Ministry of Economy. She should actually withdraw that and actually apologise for misleading Parliament.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Madam Speaker, that was the information....

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Members, as I have mentioned previously, it is very important that you present accurate information and data in this Parliament. And the onus is on you to validate your information. So I would ask you to please be more accurate.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Can I continue?

HON. SPEAKER.- Next time. Please continue.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Madam Speaker, moving on to the Women, the Honourable Prime Minister says a lot of good things, good commitments about the women empowerment and development in the overseas scene. But it is very disappointing and I am always disappointed on how small the budgetary allocation is for women. And, Madam Speaker, the budgetary allocation is the numerical expression of the Government's mandate on how they view the women of Fiji. So with that kind of \$4.4 million, that is so insufficient to be able to effectively implement the Women's Plan of Action and the National Gender Policy.

(Hon. Member interjects)

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Madam Speaker, the SODELPA Government is serious about narrowing the gender gap by policy review through gender lenses and will adopt a gender responsive budget and temporary special measures that would enable an essential and greater understanding of the impact of policies and gender to address the entrenched economic disadvantages. Thank you.

Now moving on to the Civil Service, Madam Speaker, the Honourable Minister for Economy flaunted the salary increases for Civil Service as if it was something really big, but he forgot the 5 percent pay cut in 2007 and that was restored in 2014.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Radrodro, that was the second bell? Jeanette, was that the first or second bell?

DEPUTY SECRETARY-GENERAL.- Second.

HON. SPEAKER.-There were so many interjections and we did not hear the first bell, but that was the second bell. Thank you very much, Honourable Radrodro. I will now call upon the Honourable Dr. Brij Lal to have the floor.

HON. DR. B. LAL.- Madam Speaker, the Honourable Prime Minister, the Honourable Leader of Opposition, Honourable Ministers and Honourable Members of Parliament: *bula re!* Kindly lend me your ears for the next eight minutes.

I rise to support the 2017-2018 Budget presented to the Parliament by the Honourable Minister for Economy on Thursday, 29th June, 2017.

Madam Speaker, allow me to sincerely thank the Honourable Minister for Economy and his team for the effort put in, in preparing this Budget. This is one of the most powerful budgets that Fiji has ever had.

HON. DR. B. LAL.-The dreams of the generation that build Fiji on the belief with hope and hard work, they could deliver a better future for themselves and for their children, and their children's children can now be realized.

Our economy is strong and continues to grow from strength to strength. The indicators show that Fiji is moving in the right direction. The business confidence is strong and labour market conditions and our tourism industry continues to boom.

(Hon. Member interjects)

HON. DR. B. LAL.- Madam Speaker, the FijiFirst plan is clear. Smart ambitious investments in people through reforms, in communities through SMEs and high growth in industries leads to opportunities. Opportunities leads to jobs, jobs lead to more confidence. The Government's role in all of this is to lend support to those who are driving us forward and make sure everyone has a real and fair chance to success. This means ensuring our most basic needs are met.

Madam Speaker, I will limit my speech to the housing assistance provided to the first home buyers. Fiji has moved 47 years ahead of Independence. Governments have come, they have ruled and they have gone.

(Hon. Member interjects)

HON. DR. B. LAL.- The country has achieved something and there is much more that needs to be achieved. As the saying goes; “your life does not get better by chance, it gets better by change” – the words of Jim Rohn.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. DR. B. LAL.- That is the change that this Bainimarama-led FijiFirst Government is bringing and our actions and decisions of today will shape the way our Fijians will be living in the future.

This Budget will enable us to build a more responsible society, a society where this Government will back those who work hard and do the right thing; will look after its elderly; disabled, youths; women; the workforce and the ordinary citizens. Building this society is not possible without placing sound welfare initiatives.

Robert Kiyosaki once said, “ There are those who make things happen, there are those who watch things happen and there are those who say what happened”.

(Laughter)

In our case here, this FijiFirst Government is making things happen.

I want to stress that a lot of young people will genuinely need a roof over their heads. They want to own a house and live a life of their own. Every person has a hope to own a house but this is becoming extremely difficult due to high costs of lands, building materials, the demand by carpenters for hourly wages and other family needs.

The value of owning a house was realized by our *Girmityas* in the early 1800s and 1900s, as some of you may have read in my book: *Forgotten Struggles of Fiji Gimit*.” They really emphasized on the building a house for themselves and their children. Everyone needs a house regardless of race or religion or where you live.

The Constitution requires that Government use resources available to it to achieve the progressive realization of the rights of every person to accessible and adequate housing.

Owning a house is an investment. If you rent a house, the monthly rent that you pay goes for ever. Owning a house means you do not necessarily have to pay interest on the loans. The value of your house will go up over the years. You will enjoy having something that is yours.

In 2012, the Reserve Bank of Fiji established a housing facility for low-income first house owners. The RBF channelled \$25 million through the Housing Authority of Fiji. The applicants were those who earned below \$16,500 annually and were charged interest at the rate of 6 percent per annum.

In 2014, the threshold for applicants was raised to \$25,000. The RBF dropped its interest rate from 6 percent to 5 percent and the Housing Authority from 2 percent to 1 percent, 180 first home buyers were assisted, 66 customers purchased readily built houses and 114 first home buyers purchased residential leases and constructed their first homes.

In 2015, the RBF allocated \$25 million to Housing Authority, at an interest of 5 percent. The Ministry of Housing and Environment assisted 374 first home buyers; 192 purchased readily built homes and 162 purchased residential leases and built their homes.

In the 2016-2017 Budget, the RBF allocated \$25 million to the Housing Authority at a rate of 1 percent. The applicants qualified if they earned up to \$25,000 per year. In the first quarter, 118 first home buyers were assisted.

According to the 2017-2018 Budget, the RSB has allocated a sum of \$60 million to the Housing Authority to assist first home buyers. The funds will be made available at 1 percent to the bank which will lend it at a maximum of 5 percent. The threshold for applicant is those who earn below \$50,000 a year. This will give an opportunity to some 1,200-plus new first home owners to own a house.

Madam Speaker, if I was asked to name the chief benefit of a house, I would say, “the house shelters the day dreaming, the house protects the dreamer and the house allows one to dream in peace”.

A house is made of walls and beams for which money is provided by Government but inside the house is the home which is built with love and dreams that is why we call it ‘Home Sweet Home’. This is the place to find happiness, which the FijiFirst Government does not want to deny to any of our citizens.

Madam Speaker, the FijiFirst Government has shown, and will continue to show national leadership in housing. These are good signs of the plan that is working well. That is why we will continue to invest in our people, our communities and our economy while maximising every dollar and ensuring it is spent well. We must remember that we are preparing Fiji for the future of the future.

We all know that governing is not a popularity contest. It is about doing what is right for our country, not just for today, but for the long term and that is what the FijiFirst Government is determined to do. Our values, our stories, our cultures shine for the world. Our national resources and natural beauty are unparalleled, allowing us to share the joys of building a campfire (a scouting term) with our kids, senior and visitors.

I strongly encourage our youths to invest in a house, with the finance that is available to them. Remember, your attitude and your choices that you make today will help you to build a house that you will live in tomorrow. Build wisely for the opportunities given so that you can proudly say “my home offers affection, security and happiness to my life and I am very proud of my house.”

Twenty-years from now, you will be more disappointed by the things you did not do, compared to what you did. So, throw off your bowlines, sail away from the safe harbour, catch the trade winds in the sail. Explore, dream, dream, discover and build your house while the FijiFirst sun is shining.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. DR. B. LAL.- God Bless every Fijian. Thank you.

HON.SPEAKER.- Thank you, I now give the floor to the Honourable Netani Rika.

HON. LT. COL. N. RIKA.- Madam Speaker, the Honourable Prime Minister, the Honourable Leader of Opposition, Honourable Ministers and Honourable Members of Parliament: I rise to make my contribution in support of the 2017-2018 National Budget, delivered by the Honourable Minister of Economy and Attorney-General, the Honourable Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum on Thursday 29<sup>th</sup> June, 2017.

Madam Speaker, the Budget was also labelled by many as the “Budget for the people.” However, people have the right to their own opinion of the Budget. Obviously we cannot please everyone but the Honourable Minister of Economy from the outset of this Budget announcement, he made it very clear to the whole nation where the emphasis lies, and of course, it is the Government’s mandated responsibility, as enshrined in the Constitution, chapter 7, clause 144.



Madam Speaker, the bottom line of our being here, as Members of Parliament is serve the Fijian people out there in every segment of our society.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. LT. COL. N. RIKA.- They are watching, they are listening as we continue to debate on the 2017-2018 National Budget. We, the Honourable Members of this august House, must provide the people out there with all the correct and valid information in regards to this Budget, I mean facts not assumptions.

Madam Speaker, when we make assumption about what others are doing or thinking, most of the time we personalise things and then we blame them and react by sending emotional poison with our words. We only see what we want to see and hear what we want to hear. We do not perceive things the way they are. We literally dream things up in our imagination because we are free to ask for clarification, we make assumption that we believe are right, then we defend our assumption and try to make others wrong. In other words, we assume things but we must remember that when you assume things is always a disaster. For Heaven's sake, Honourable Members, get the facts right!

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. LT. COL. N. RIKA.- Madam Speaker, my area of focus is on the topic of Climate Change. Climate Change is a universal phenomenon that affect everyone. Climate change can be a serious threat to ecosystem, biodiversity, food, water supplies, as well as the livelihood and well-being of communities across the Pacific region. Even though Fiji and the other Pacific Islands collectively emit less than 1 percent of the total global greenhouse gases responsible for climate change, the region is one of the most vulnerable to its impact. This can include temperature, variability, storm surges, drought, sea level rise, changes in rainfall patterns and cyclones. These challenges has become a necessity. Sea level rise threatens low-lying islands, where saltwater wells and global temperatures hit record highs and it kills stable food crops, as well as damaging property.

Madam Speaker, two Category 5 cyclones hit the Pacific region in the past two years. *TC Pam* hit Vanuatu in March 2015 and of course the *TC Winston* was the strongest tropical cyclone to hit the Southern Hemisphere.

Madam Speaker, the World Meteorological Organisation (WMO) on the statement on the state of global climate in 2016, drought conditions predominated across much of the globe, aggravated by El Nino phenomenon statement. Also noted the extent of global sea ice fell to a minimum of 4.14 million per square kilometres in 2016. The second lowest on record.

Warming signs and great concern of the development occurring in Antarctica, where ice mass are becoming unstable, the scientific agencies are joining forces to get accurate measurements in the main trouble spots. The scientist working in Antarctica with their commitment has become a race against time. However, at our level, we must be reminded that when every person in the world who gets into a car eats a meal and board a plane is contributing to the emissions that puts a frozen continent at risk. If those emissions continue unchecked and the world is allowed to heat up, then no doubt that large parts of the Antarctica will melt into the sea, thus causing sea level to rise.

Madam Speaker, the leaders of the Conference of Parties (COP) have been working overtime, reminding the whole world of our role as good stewards of the world's environment and resources. This message is very critical for everyone to take heed of and immediately take action in order to reduce the effect of climate change in the world.

Madam Speaker, the message is seriously directed towards the leaders of developed and COP industrial nations of the world to reduce their output of emissions released into the atmosphere. It is their stewardship responsibility and leadership role to do so. For that, I commend the President of the COP23, the Honourable Prime Minister for being the lone voice in the wilderness, encouraging the world leaders to come together in unity and pursue this common goal of saving the world from the effect of climate change.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. LT. COL. N. RIKA.- Madam Speaker, the total allocation towards climate change related project in 2017-2018, the budget is \$319,859,394 and the breakdown with 36 projects disseminated as climate adaptation and 13 as climate mitigation. The policy initiatives is in support of the climate change is as follows:

1. Plastic bag: Tax under this tax \$0.10 will charge the bag in order to reduce plastic waste and usage in Fiji;
2. Environment and Climate Adaptation levy - a special fund will be established to better utilise funds generated by the levy to finance environment and climate project;
3. Social Responsibility Tax Reapportionment; the social responsibility tax is imposed on any individual that has a chargeable income of over \$270,000. Ten percent of the tax revenue is now reapportionment to the environment and climate adaptation levy fund to increase the amount available to fund the environmental protection and climate- related initiative; and
4. Issuance of green bonds: Government has partnered with International Finance Corporation and the Reserve Bank of Fiji to issue \$100 million in green bonds that with raise capital to fund project that have environmental benefits, including in renewable energy, low carbon transport and forestry projects.

Madam Speaker, the major allocation of climate related expenses are fairly distributed among the climate-related Government Ministries as have been alluded by the various Ministers of various Ministries in their submissions.

Madam Speaker, this Budget has done a lot to climate change and it is greatly supporting the Sustainable Development Goal 13 (SDG 13) and Sustainable Development Goal 14 (SDG 14). Madam Speaker, the nation is benefitting a lot on this climate change and as we go through all these activities and programmes of climate change, the improvement of equipment and all the programmes and plans but the most important is the leadership role that has been taken by the Honourable Prime Minister as the President of COP23 and it will be held in Bonn in Germany. It is our duty to support the leadership of the COP23 for the successful session that will be held in Germany in November, 2017.

Madam Speaker, with those few words, I would like to make myself clear and I strongly support the 2017-2018 National Budget. Thank you for your indulgence and may God bless the new Fiji.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I now give the floor to the Honourable Minister for Agriculture, Rural Maritime Development and National Disaster Management.

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, the Honourable Prime Minister, the Honourable Cabinet Ministers, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition and Honourable Members of Parliament: I rise to add my contribution to the Honourable Members who

have spoken before me and to offer my commendations to the Honourable Minister for Economy and his team for a bold, well- thought-out and visionary 2017-2018 National Budget.

Madam Speaker, the FijiFirst Government continues to confirm to the Fijian people that it is only through far sightedness, meticulous planning and prudent management that we continue to deliver our promises to our people.

In due respect, Madam Speaker, this august House needs to appreciate that it was not by accident that we achieved profound improvements in Fiji's economic indicators in the last few years. In fact, Madam Speaker, it was the FijiFirst Government that has proven that it had the determination to deliver the eight years of consecutive economic growth. Also, it was the Bainimarama-led Government that registered record increases in foreign reserves, and it is also the same Government that allowed the benefits of this growth to be shared with the people of this country. This unprecedented achievement is no mean feat and certainly was not made for the faint-hearted to deliver.

Madam Speaker, listening to the responses from the other side, I wish to concentrate on agriculture because there is a lot to talk about, but not sugar agriculture particularly. I went back last night and dug up some of my notes from Staff College. When I looked at the responses from the other side, I did an essay in Staff College, Madam Speaker, on the effect of air power on Kosovo and the Afghanistan Campaign. There is a process called strategic paralysis which is process-orientated and you target the leadership that leads to psychological incapacitation.

Madam Speaker, that is the response that we are getting from the other side. You can see chaos, you can see disorder, you can see disaster, and there is a difference between facts and lies. Madam Speaker, that is a result of strategic paralysis and unfortunately the Budget did not go well with the other side and that is the implication. They are strategically paralysed.

Let me add to that, there is initial confusion, Madam Speaker, and that will lead to disorder and de-generate into a state of internal dissolution. I like the theory of empower and I hope I can have more time to speak on this.

Madam Speaker, despite the havoc brought by *TC Winston* last year, Fiji still managed to record an economic growth. I am tired of hearing the rehabilitation efforts post- TC Winston. We have stated it so many times in this House, Madam Speaker, there are competing needs and we have limited resources. We are prioritising, Madam Speaker, I have stated it, we did so well, why? Because there is political will and commitment. Also, there is strong good decisive leadership and, of course, we value the contribution of the men and women and, of course, our partners as well. It is not going to take a day to fix all the problems that we have. Of course, there are issues beyond our control and again, we must applaud the efforts taken by Government for the recovery process.

Just this morning, Madam Speaker, I had an email from the Australian High Commission here in Suva, based on the discussions that I had with the Honourable Julie Bishop just two weeks ago in Canberra. Australia is asking Fiji to host a regional conference around November after COP 23 for us to look at lessons learnt, not only for Fiji but for the region. Why Fiji, Madam Speaker? Because Fiji is leading and doing so well in disaster management and responses, Madam Speaker. Again, that is reflective of the strong good leadership of the FijiFirst Government.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Madam Speaker, the Honourable Member was not here when I talked about the recovery processes. There are three lessons learnt, let me teach the Honourable

Member on this. Firstly, is the way we do development, development must change because things are changing.

Secondly, is the way we see things, so our paradigm must change. That is the problem with the other side. We are in a different environment altogether, but the paradigm has remained the same all these years. Madam Speaker, I am reminded of the words of a philosopher who said, I quote: "Progress is impossible without change, people who cannot change their mind, people who cannot change their paradigm, cannot change anything." That is why you need the FijiFirst Government so that we can continue with the changes.

Thirdly, the way we do partnership. Of course, Fiji cannot work in isolation, we are part of a bigger global world, Madam Speaker. Of course, we have our friends and partners to work with us, and you do not politicise humanitarian assistance. People need to learn more about humanitarian assistance.

I shall now focus on agriculture Madam Speaker, let me tell all Fijians and all Honourable Members of the House, look at the twist in which statements are coming from the other side! Now, they are clearly demarcating between sugar and non-sugar agriculture and they are making comparisons between the allocation in sugar and non-sugar. Why? Because the race card is back, Madam Speaker! The race card is back, Madam Speaker, yes the race card is back! They are making a lot of comparisons about the allocation in the sugar sector and the non-sugar sector.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Point of Order, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Point of Order.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- I think the Honourable Minister is imputing improper motives. In fact, the 30 percent of the sugarcane farmers in this country today are *itaukei*, so it is not race card. Remember that 30 percent of them are *itaukeis* as well.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, that is no point of order. Actually, the Minister will be given extra time.

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am excited about this debate.

HON. RO T.V. KEPÄ.- Do not stress yourself!

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- I am not stressed, I am enjoying it.

Madam Speaker, Government has continued to create economic environment. There is a difference between facts and truth. Unlike the other side, they are always willing to come and lie in this august House. People lied about the budget and the debt level, and so many things before the last Election. I will not go into that, but let me give you some facts that will lead us to the truth.

Madam Speaker, for the non-sugar agriculture, there has been significant increases from 2014, once it became a standalone Ministry from the Fisheries and Forests. The budget allocation for the last four years is this, Madam Speaker, in 2014 the allocation for the non-sugar agriculture was \$46.1 million. The budget allocation for 2015 was \$64.9 million from the \$46.1 million in 2014. In 2016, it was \$76.2 million. In the 2016-2017 Budget, it was \$74.4 million and now, it is \$86.3 million in the current Budget. How can you say that the non-sugar sector has been deprived of funding?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Very poor, very poor!

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Madam Speaker, in 2014, it was \$46.1 million, now it is \$86.3 million so we are just \$6 million short of doubling the allocation given to the Ministry of Agriculture, particularly for the non-sugar sector.

This year Madam Speaker, we have added on the Committee on the Better Utilisation of Land (CBUL) but we have taken away the Ministry of Waterways. Land and Water Resources Management (LWRM) was with the Ministry of Agriculture so despite taking away the allocation on the Ministry for Waterways, we still have \$86.3 million. That is a fact, Madam Speaker, and people can know the truth from what I have just said.

Secondly, it is unfair, Madam Speaker, to say before this august House that the performance of the agriculture sector is continuing to decrease. Yes, Madam Speaker, I agree when you look at the contribution to GDP percentagewise. But when you look at the value and you look at the money that is coming from the agriculture sector, Honourable Professor Biman Prasad should hear this, it continues to increase, and that is the fair way to look at it.

I have always talked about good analysis, Madam Speaker. Listen to this! This is the May 2017 latest FCOSS Report, Fiji Bureau of Statistics Report and Macro Economic Committee Report, all reveal these figures on the non-sugar sector performance as a share of GDP.

Madam Speaker, in 2011, 8.2 percent with the value of \$472.6 million. This is from the FCOSS Report and not Inia Seruiratu's report. In 2012, 8.0 percent with the value of \$465.2 million, slight decrease because of *TC Evans*.

Now, listen to this! In 2013, 8.2 percent with the value of \$497 million. In 2011, 8.2 percent with the value of \$472 million but now it is \$497 million, Madam Speaker. In 2014, it went down to 7 percent but listen to the value, \$500.4 million. Honourable Professor Prasad is probably twitting to some sources. In 2015, 8.1 percent with the value of \$541 million. Where are all these coming from? Government has created the condition and I stand before this august House to fix agriculture, Madam Speaker, to get rid of the spider. Get rid of the spider first!

(Laughter)

There has been a major challenge in the last few years, Madam Speaker. For you to get rid of the cobweb, kill the spider. I will be remembered for that statement in this august House, Madam Speaker.

(Laughter)

Madam Speaker, in a nutshell, we will continue to create the environment and we will continue to provide the services to our people. I will just quickly go through a few key activities in the Ministry for Agriculture.

Madam Speaker, the Honourable Ratu Kiliraki talked about mechanisation. We agree that within mechanisation but go and see the FijiFirst Manifesto, mechanisation only appeared in the 2014 National Budget. In the last three years, Madam Speaker, because it is in the FijiFirst Manifesto and we are delivering.

This year, there is an increased allocation. Why? Because we want to buy three additional excavators; one will go to Lomaivuna, one will go to Tailevu and one will go to Serua/Namosi. Nadroga has already go theirs, Madam Speaker, and Ra province has also go theirs. We are monitoring the performance of these machines, and then we will go to the other areas as well but we are strategically

selecting these areas because of the production levels and most importantly, the connectivity to the market.

I know that the Honourable Parmod Chand is going to ask about Vanua Levu. He had talked about Vanua Levu yesterday, Madam Speaker, but no government has done that. Starting from 2008, we implemented the Northern Development Programme (NDP) that supported the Look North Policy. And if you look at the amount of developments in Vanua Levu, Madam Speaker, unprecedented!

The Honourable Member talked about the Namuavoivoi/Daria Road, but it was this Government that cleaned up that road. Now, it only takes 30 minutes to come from Wainunu to Dreketi. The people from Bua are listening there, Madam Speaker.

He talked about Nayarabale/Vanuavou, Madam Speaker, it was this Government that constructed that road and I have been reliably told that he is offering to provide bus services to that road, and that is why he wants it fixed.

HON. P. CHAND.- (Inaudible interjection)

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Yes, it is for the people, but you have an interest in that as well.

(Laughter)

Madam Speaker, I want to talk about agro processors facilities, Madam Speaker, which is a new allocation in the 2017-2018 Budget/. Again, it is the first, I have always mentioned in this House that agriculture cannot thrive if you just concentrate on production. That was the major weakness of agriculture in Fiji because we were production-driven but we neglected the whole value chain.

Madam Speaker, this year, Government has allocated \$1 million, additional to the other programmes which I will not touch in detail, for the construction of agro processing facility. Why? Because agricultural commodities are perishable, like it loses its quality, it loses its values. Most of the rural Fiji have brilliant environment for production but unfortunately, in the absence of good logistics, cold storage, packing sheds and even markets, they will not contribute positively towards development and, of course, the growth of our economy. That is why Government is now, for the first time ever, allocating \$1 million for agro processing facilities.

While still on agro processing facilities, they talked about AMA. Look at the allocation to AMA - \$5 million for capital allocation and, of course, more than \$1 million for operational costs, Madam Speaker.

Vanua Levu again, last year, the Honourable Viam Pillay, the Assistant Minister for Agriculture opened the first facility which is the packing facility, in Savusavu for Coastal Cakaudrove and hopefully, more products from Taveuni as well can be processed in Savusavu and then shipped to Suva.

This year, there is also plans for us to bring the Reefer containers to Savusavu. Of course, there are also plans in place for us to fix the facility in Dama, Bua so that it can cover the border between Macuata and Bua and, of course, the area from Wainunu to Dama Tikina. The area between Kubulau can be serviced together with Wailevu West Coast from Savusavu.

Madam Speaker, I wish to commend the other few programmes which are related to agriculture. First is the construction of eight mini markets. This is a welcome initiative, particularly for the non-sugar agriculture sector because in the main markets that we have, of course, we appreciate the work of the

vendors association, but most provinces have difficulty in entering the markets because of the vendors association. So these eight mini markets will be constructed will really bring a lot of relief to our farmers, particularly those who buy agriculture products from these farmers.

Secondly, Madam Speaker, is the construction of roadside stalls. Again, that is another welcome initiative for non-sugar agriculture because of the implication that it will have on our people in marketing their products.

I have talked about farm mechanisation, Madam Speaker, and I talked about the excavators. Let me highlight that in the last few years, we distributed 15 tractors. These are the people who can afford to pay their one-third contribution:

- Natogadravu Village Farmers' Group in Tailevu;
- Lutu Farmers Group in Naitasiri;
- Mr. Anilesh Prasad of Tokatoka, Tailevu;
- Lovolovo Farmers Group of Ba;
- Veilomani Farmers Group of Nasarowaqa, Bua,;
- Mr. Kamal Prasad of Namalata, Tailevu;
- Ravindra Singh of Nokonoko, Nadroga; and
- Eight tractors for the Ministry of Agriculture Stations.

Again, let me tell the farmers of Fiji that, that is for those who can afford to pay their one-third contribution. However, for those that do not have the funds, the FijiFirst Government brought in an allocation for land clearing, and that has a \$1.5 million allocation, so farmers can access this.

Let me conclude, Madam Speaker, again, I am thankful for the allocation that is given to the Ministry of Agriculture. Currently, together with the Civil Service Reform, we will assure this august House, the successful implementation of the National Budget in terms of the quality of our personnel which we are working on, and the processes that are involved.

Madam Speaker, the allocation of \$86.3 million to the Ministry of Agriculture under the 2017-2018 National Budget is sufficient to cater for all the activities that the Ministry of Agriculture has planned for, and we look forward to the successful implementation of the various programmes in this coming financial year.

Madam Speaker, without any hesitation and doubt, I support the 2017-2018 National Budget as presented by the Minister for Economy.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call upon the Honourable Assistant Minister for Agriculture to have the floor.

HON. V. PILLAY.- Madam Speaker, the Honourable Prime Minister, the Honourable Ministers, the Honourable Leader of Opposition and Honourable Members; like other Honourable Members who have spoken before me, I rise to contribute and offer my congratulations to the Honourable Minister for Economy for a well-thought and articulated 2017-2018 National Budget.

Madam Speaker, the increased allocation of \$86.3 million for the Ministry of Agriculture is a confidence booster for the sector and shows the seriousness with which Government views agriculture development in Fiji. This budget gives flexibility to the Ministry of Agriculture and its stakeholders in terms of forming partnerships with each other, to address common challenges.

Madam Speaker, Government has seen it fit to increase the budget allocated to the Ministry of Agriculture out of its concern for the mainly rural-based and mostly poor farming communities in Fiji. Government has also shown through this budget, its commitment to the uplifting of individuals through economic empowerment as ways and means of building a vigorous economy. The various programmes to be implemented by the Ministry of Agriculture under this new budget will immensely contribute to fixing those challenges that currently limit the abilities of our rural people to unlock their true economic potential in the agriculture sector.

Madam Speaker, active agriculture production in the most idle lands of our rural areas, both at subsistence or commercial level, should lead to empowerment of those individuals within rural communities and enable them to contribute to economic activities. The process of empowering our rural communities for the betterment of their lives is something that the FijiFirst Government has prioritised from the day it formed Government, and it will continue to do so.

Madam Speaker, I am thankful to the Government for the \$7.79 million allocated to CBUL under the Ministry of Agriculture's 2017-2018 Budget. This allocation will allow CBUL and the Ministry of Agriculture to work closely in addressing the availability of land to those who want to genuinely venture into active agriculture production and contribute to the growth of Fiji's economy. We will strengthen our pursuit to find suitable and attractive opportunities for the use of these land in the new financial year.

Madam Speaker, the general increases in most of the allocations under the Ministry of Agriculture budget means an increase also in the number of rural communities and individuals to be assisted. The increase will also see increased activities and movement by the Ministry officials in terms of interaction with farmers and the private sector, in an effort to improve responses to the needs of stakeholders. It will also lead to a general improvement in service delivery, taking into consideration the impacts of the current Civil Service Reform.

Madam Speaker, the Ministry of Agriculture through its various programmes, offers assistance that will guide individuals to active commercial agriculture production. There are a range of programmes that address challenges in crop and livestock production faced by our farmers. This is in terms of land clearing and preparation, proper husbandry practices, soil fertility, farm infrastructure, mechanisation and roads. The successful implementation of these programmes should lead to increased agriculture production for domestic food needs and exports.

Madam Speaker, let me state that given the commitment made by Government to the agriculture sector under this budget, timeliness of implementation is critical, if the objective of Government to grow the sector is to be achieved. The Ministry of Agriculture will ensure that proper monitoring and evaluation systems are in place to monitor the progress on programme implementation. At the same time, we will continue to find efficiencies and streamline our processes, so that this assistance is provided promptly and to those who need it most.

Madam Speaker, in the recent months, I have been visiting and talking to the farmers, right on their farms to hear their issues and at the same time, find solutions. This will continue in the future, as next week I will be visiting our farmers in Levuka, and then to the Northern Division, Eastern Division, Central Division and also the Western Division.

Madam Speaker, let me conclude by stating once again my appreciation to Government, our Honourable Prime Minister and the Honourable Minister for Economy, for presenting to Fijians a well-planned National Budget for the 2017-2018 financial year. This Budget will go a long way in uplifting the living standards of the Fijian people, especially the poor rural communities.

Madam Speaker, I extend my full support to the 2017-2018 National Budget.



HON. SPEAKER.- I now call upon the Honourable Prem Singh to take the floor.

HON. P. SINGH.- Madam Speaker, at the outset, let me just correct the Honourable Minister for Agriculture when we talked about sugar. For his information, we talk about everyone in the sugar industry. There are some 30 percent of the growers, who are itaukei growers.

Madam Speaker, as I was penning my thoughts on what has been described by some as a fantastic, phenomenal budget, the realisation that struck me is that the 2017-2018 Appropriation Bill is really a budget, a strategic plan to cure the fundamental problems faced by our people and many sectors of our economy or is it a campaign statement of a panic-stricken government which in its combined total governance period of both as a military regime and as FijiFirst Government of over 10 years since January 2007, has driven many sectors of our economy and taxpayers or people's lives to ruin, yet desperately and aggressively trying to camouflage the reality of its failed policies in the last 10 years?

Madam Speaker, what then I conclude is that, this Budget is a reactionary one. It is a direct response to what the NFP has been proposing to the people of Fiji as a real pragmatic solution. So Madam Speaker, the NFP does not need to move from here to there or to the other side. We do not need to move from here to there, to effect change. We are grandmasters of change from wherever we sit. Our track record speaks for itself.

The Honourable Minister for Economy made their reactionary stance to NFP when he said while announcing the Budget, and I quote:

“... we hear the simplistic cry to single out products for VAT exemptions. It is the siren song of populism, a shameless appeal to emotion that tries to conceal a fundamental. But this Government, Madam Speaker, prefers to treat problems, not symptoms. We prefer a systematic cure and sound economic management, not magic elixirs and band aid - a cure that reflects the real way people live and shop.”

We hear the simplistic cry to single out products for VAT exemptions. It is the siren song of populism, a shameless appeal to emotion that tries to conceal a fundamental lie. But this Government, Madam Speaker, prefers to treat problems, not symptoms. We prefer a systematic cure and sound economic management, not magic elixirs and band aids – a cure that reflects the real way people live and shop.”

HON. A.SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you for quoting.

HON. P. SINGH.- Madam Speaker, the electorate knows all too well who the snake oil merchants are. The very things that the Government is accusing the NFP and others of doing, is what this Budget is actually about.

To paraphrase the Honourable Minister's own words, the 2017-2018 Budget is the siren song of populism, a shameless appeal to emotion that tries to conceal a fundamental lie. Nothing else. It is a Budget as rightly described by the Honourable Leader of NFP, as one full of promises and lies – a good, bad and a downright ugly Budget.

This Budget does not even genuinely attempt to cure one of the greatest sicknesses of all – our enslavement to the rising cost of living. Even the announcement of pay rises for our civil servants is strictly conditional – more stringent than the “conditions apply” inscribed in very fine print for the small number of discounted seats on a Fiji Airways flight.

Madam Speaker, on the other hand, the Honourable Minister announces public service vehicles like taxis, rental cars, mini buses and hire cars can now renew their permits every ten years instead of three years, and that bus route licenses are now valid for 15 years. This is well and good and we embrace it. But in the very next breath, civil servants, teachers and nurses are being subjected to administrative trickery to reduced work-life tenure.

One can only presume that this is an underhand attempt to phase-down the Government SEG 1 expenditure.

In the eyes of this Government, the value of sound, secure employment of an individual civil servant is insignificant. While bus companies with an annual turnover of less than \$1.5 million are entitled to loans at an interest rate of 5 percent, our civil servants and teachers cannot obtain long term loans to invest in properties and decent homes because commercial banks insist on tenured employment.

This is one of the most painful examples of how the current Government. In the Honourable Minister's own words, is treating problems and not symptoms through magic elixirs and band aids. The lives and guarantees of security of employment of our civil servants, teachers and nurses are not a priority.

This modern day slavery forces them to enter into non-negotiable contracts in return for a meagre pay rise. We would seriously counsel the Government to check their campaign strategy, because this animosity against our civil servants is an unwise move if they intend to, as the Honourable Prime Minister said, remain on that side of the House.

Consider this, Madam Speaker, salaries, per diems and allowances of the Prime Minister, Cabinet Ministers and Members of Parliament are locked in through the Parliamentary Remunerations Act. It cannot be reduced unless there are austerity measures such as during a recession.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Whose playing for the gallery now?

HON. P. SINGH.- But if our civil servants want to qualify for a meagre 14.3 percent pay rise, they have to lock themselves in a contract. Where is the justice and fair play? Or is this the Government's version or true and equal citizenry? Perhaps it is even a case of George Orwell's *Animal Farm*, where some are more equal than others.

Madam Speaker, I wish to tell the Government that the enslavement and subjugation of civil servants, teachers and nurses will end after next year's General Elections. This is not a shameless appeal to emotion but the naked truth. An NFP Government will change this by revoking the contracts with permanent employment and, Madam Speaker, I might add to what the Leader of NFP has said, increasing the retirement age to 60 years.

Madam Speaker, right here in this Parliament, we heard an electioneering speech from the Honourable Prime Minister who said his FijiFirst Government was looking at the bigger picture. Madam Speaker, pictures tell a thousand words.

The only bigger picture of the FijiFirst Government that we can see, Madam Speaker, is:

- the stratospheric rise of cost of living;
- hikes in unemployment levels;
- introducing a meagre minimum wage of \$2.32 to be increased to \$2.68;
- rising cost of doing business;
- widening the gap between the rich and the poor;
- describing businesses as bandits;
- labelling housing occupied by the poor as ghettos;

- ignoring Government's social responsibility to the people of Ra by closing the Penang Mill;
- refusing to adhere to recommendations of the Multinational Observer Group to change electoral laws and the design of the ballot papers;
- using its Parliamentary majority to amend Standing Orders to ensure Government controls and chairs the Public Accounts Committee, contrary to common practice in 67 percent of Commonwealth countries;
- refusing to hear the pleas of our kidney patients by not increasing grants for dialysis yet allocates millions of dollars in grants to organisations like Fiji Airways and Fiji Broadcasting Commission;
- wasting a few million dollars on an anti-patriotic exercise like changing the Fiji flag;
- re-imposing VAT on seven basic food items in a blatant betrayal of a promise in the FijiFirst manifesto, which clearly stated that zero-rating on these basic food items will continue;
- the Honourable Minister for Economy with all his portfolios probably controls 60 percent of the total Budget, \$1.94 billion or almost 45 percent of the Budget is under "R" or Requisition;
- national debt level is ballooning with borrowing done against an inflated GDP and the list goes on.

And Madam Speaker, might I say that blessed are the youths because they will inherit the national debt.

The call by the NFP through its leader that an NFP Government will increase the food basket of basic food items from seven to fifteen and ensure that they are zero-rated and VAT free has been described by the Honourable Minister of Economy as a siren song and a shameless appeal to emotion.

This basically means, Madam Speaker, that in the bigger picture of FijiFirst, the poor do not matter. Simply, those who were already below the \$16,000 threshold have received nothing in terms of cushioning the high cost of living. That includes almost two thirds of our workforce.

Duties and VAT on basic food items remain. It is simply ludicrous to assume that the poor will not benefit from reduction of duty on items like towels, shoes and baby wipes – can they eat them? Our poverty stricken people will only benefit if the basket of basic food items is increased to 15 VAT free basic items and NFP will do this.

Madam Speaker, much has been said about the sugar industry, an industry that weathered many storms, natural disasters, floods and even four military *coups*. An industry that remained year in and year out the backbone of our economy for over a century because every single cent derived from the industry is circulated right here in Fiji.

But, Madam Speaker, the industry has taken so much of a battering in the last ten years that it is now staggering, and this battering is man-made, primarily influenced by the current Government. The number of active cane growers fell by almost 6,000 to under 12,000 in the last ten years. Cane production declined from 3.2 million tonnes to 1.38 million tonnes – a reduction of 1.82 million tonnes.

After enormous pressure from the NFP and the growers, the Government finally decided to provide increased subsidies for fertilisers, weedicides and cane planting and we thank you. It is three months of continued pressure.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. P. SINGH.- A responsible government would have also extended the subsidies for other categories of agricultural farmers like, *dalo*, *yaqona*, rice, vegetables and other crops. If for anything else, but for our food security in such high climate risk times such as these. They also need major injection of funds to boost their production because they also contribute to the economy and to our agricultural exports. So we are not confining ourselves to the sugar industry. So do our dairy farmers who have been denied an increase in milk prices. But is this enough? Or is it too little too late? The latter seems to be correct.

Growers harvest an average of 20 to 30 tonnes of cane per acre. On average, six bags of fertilizer is used in an acre of cane. This means growers save \$69 in fertilizer subsidies for every acre. For a grower producing 20 tonnes in an acre, the savings equates to \$3.45 per tonne of cane. For a grower producing 30 tonnes in an acre, the subsidy equates to \$2.30 per tonne. If you add the weedicide subsidy of \$1 per tonne, the total savings per tonne is \$4.45 per tonne for a 20-tonne per acre producer and \$3.30 per tonne for a 30-tonne producer.

Even if we are producing two million tonnes of cane annually, the subsidy will be the total value of the fertilizer and weedicide will be around \$6.6 million to \$8.9 million.

What growers need is a meaningful increase to the price of cane, Madam Speaker, and this can only happen if a minimum guaranteed price of \$100 per tonne is implemented with an annual subsidy of \$50 million, that will cover both the subsidy and the guaranteed cane price.

At the current average cost of production of \$45 per tonne, growers will earn a net income of \$55 per tonne minus cultivation, production, harvesting and delivery expenses. This plan to be implemented as a priority by NFP will mean growers receive between \$50 to \$51.70 more per tonne of cane as net income, rather than the monetary value of subsidies provided by the current Government.

Madam Speaker, I have seen two Strategic Plans that have been presented to the Government by Fiji Sugar Corporation. One plan was presented to the Honourable Prime Minister last year by the then Executive Chairman of FSC. We now have another plan outlining key priorities for FSC from 2018 to 2022.

The plan looks like it was written in a mad, overnight rush. It says all the usual things about upgrading the mills and the feeder roads and the skills of the workforce, et cetera. But it says nothing about how it will keep the farmers committed to staying in the fields and that is where the tenure comes in. What is the point of upgrading sugar mills if the growers are not going to be there to grow the cane? The strategic issues are not addressed. How will we address long term land tenure? How can we add value to our raw sugar to increase the industry's profitability? How are we going to create the economies of scale that growers need to grow their cane more efficiently? And, given that we know that the Government cannot deliver anything, once we have a plan, how will we make it work?

But this is how FSC plans to make it work, Madam Speaker. One of the key priorities is to defer loan repayments so that FSC can better manage its cash flow operations. FSC plans to sell off its assets and for Government to take 100 percent control of the Corporation. And in all likelihood, this control extends to growers who have been denied a legitimate and democratic voice as the largest and most important stakeholders in the industry.

The NFP will ensure that growers regain their legitimate voice with the democratisation of the Sugar Cane Growers Council by holding elections so that growers can choose their own representatives and hold them accountable.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. P. SINGH.- We never said that, never, never.

Madam Speaker, FSC for all intents and purposes is intending to behave like the Colonial Sugar Refining Company by enslaving growers through their support and plea to Government to accelerate the Reform of the Sugar Cane Industry ....

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Prem Singh, if you are struggling to be heard, you can pause and we will give you extra time.

HON. P. SINGH. –Thank you, Madam.

I plea to Government to accelerate the reform of the sugar cane industry and Sugar Cane Growers Fund (Amendment) Bills.

This plan will not work, Madam Speaker. Deferring loan repayments or converting Government loans into equity will also fail because without cane growers and without sugarcane, there is no sugar industry and neither is there an FSC.

Changing the management of FSC without first establishing why it became technically insolvent under the previous management is a vain attempt to gloss over the fundamental ills of both the Corporation and the industry.

The FSC needs an injection of \$600 million to clear its massive debt and other fundamental problems plaguing the Corporation and its mills. The taxpayers of Fiji recently guaranteed a further \$202 million, in addition to \$120 million in 2015 to FSC.

Guarantees and loans are necessary because sugar is an industry that is far too important to be allowed to die. But to continue pumping money into an organisation without knowing what happened to the previous injection of millions of dollars is not prudent management of taxpayer's funds.

In this regard, Madam Speaker, we ask what has been the progress, if any, of the investigations that was supposed to be instituted into the Corporation and its former Chief Executive following his resignation last October.

Madam Speaker, when all is said and done, this Budget as clearly stated by the Honourable Prime Minister is anti-poor, anti-worker and not for our ordinary citizens. It is not a catalysts for real economic growth, job creation, reduction in the cost of living, or revive our sugar industry and other agricultural sectors like dairy, *yaqona*, rice to name a few. Essentially, this is all about pure electioneering by a rudderless Government. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. We will now break for lunch and as resolved by Parliament yesterday, we will limit lunch to one and half hour. Honourable Members lunch is provided in the Big Committee Room. Parliament is adjourned until 2.30 p.m.

The Parliament adjourned at 1.01 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 2.33 p.m.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Members, you may be seated.

We will move onto the next Honourable Member to speak and I call on the Honourable Ashneel Sudhakar to have the floor.

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Honourable Prime Minister, Honourable Minister for Economy, the Leader of the Opposition, fellow Members of Parliament and the people of Fiji.

I rise today to address this Honourable House and to whole -heartedly support the 2017-2018 Budget as presented to the Parliament by the Honourable Minister of Economy.

Madam Speaker, I was preparing for this speech while driving into Suva as I drove past the Rarawai Sugar Mill, I saw a healthy white smoke rising in the skies. Honourable Radrodro, the Shadow Minister of Economy scared the daylight out of me when he closed the Rarawai Mill in his speech on Monday, 11th July, 2017, especially since my own cane was delivered to that mill earlier that day. Forget about closing down the Rarawai Mill, the Rarawai Mill has not had a single breakdown this year. You closed the wrong mill, Honourable Member. I hope he has corrected the *Hansard* and next time he closes the right mill.

I hardly recovered from that shock when Honourable Bilitavu shocked me further by stating that our GDP was only \$3.5 billion instead of almost \$10 billion. The total value of goods and services produced by Fiji is about \$10 billion, Honourable Bilitavu. That is different from revenue and our national debt is below 50 percent of that GDP which means that we are a healthy economy. I hope the Opposition does not go around misinforming the public and misinterpreting the facts when the session is over thus missing the boat as Honourable Minister Koya put it.

One thus wonders if the Parliament live coverage going off the air around that time was a blessing in disguise to save the public from misrepresentation. Every year when the National Budget is delivered, we hail it as the best budget ever but every subsequent year the Honourable Minister of Economy surprises us by delivering and even bigger, better and brighter budget as the case this year.

Madam Speaker, Fiji's economy is growing like never before. We have had an unprecedented eight consecutive years of economic growth. Our economy has almost doubled in eight years. Our foreign reserves are at an all-time high of \$2.3 billion. We have doubled our GDP and tripled our revenue since 2006. Our projected revenue is at \$3.85 billion this year. Our economy is stronger than it has ever been before.

In a lay person's term and taking a household as an example, what that means is that the income of your house has tripled, the value of the goods and services you produce at home has doubled and you are able to buy more goods for yourself. You have more cash in bank or on hand to buy more furniture, recharge your mobile phones, pay your bills, pay your television bills, and buy better clothes, shoes and food. You can buy cars and build houses. You can renovate your existing house and provide comfort to your families. The increasing number of cars on the roads and the construction activity around us is a testimony to that.

HON. GOVT. MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- Echoing the Honourable Prime Minister's sentiments, the policy of the FijiFirst Government has always been not to leave anyone behind. The growth will be shared equally

among all Fijians. The pie is becoming larger and everyone will get a bigger and better piece of that pie. With a growing economy, we can afford to provide better.

My colleagues on this side of the House have spoken about various areas of the Budget which seeks to do just that. In my address I will focus on a key initiative provided by the Government which is the increase in income tax threshold and tax exemption for the first \$30,000 for everyone earning a salary.

In a major announcement, the FijiFirst Government has increased the tax threshold from \$16,000 to \$30,000. Every taxpayer will now have the first \$30,000 of their salary exempt from Pay As You Earn tax. This is a sign of a strong economy. What does that mean in terms of dollars and cents? If you are a police officer and earn \$18,000, you are required to pay \$140 as tax. If you are nurse and earn \$20,000, you were paying a tax of \$280. If you are school teacher and earn \$25,000, you were paying taxes of \$960. Likewise, if you are in the private sector, work as a bank officer and earn \$30,000, you were paying income tax of \$1,860. You are not required to pay anything now and your whole salary belongs to you. This is a direct 6.2 percent pay rise for you. If you earn more than \$30,000 then you first \$30,000 is exempt and the scenario is as follows: If you are a lawyer and earn \$35,000, you are paying income tax of \$2,760. Now you will pay only \$900 which has a saving of \$1,860. In the case of a working couple or two people earning a salary in the same household, you are set to save a total of \$3,720. The Government has reserved about \$25 million to foot your tax bill. In practical terms, the Government is giving you a 42 inch flat screen television and a Blu Ray DVD player or a Samsung S8 mobile phone every year as a Christmas gift.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Crystal clear.

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- Yes, Honourable Radrodro, Christmas has indeed come earlier for the people of Fiji and we have to thank FijiFirst for that.

Even the Honourable Members of Parliament who are criticising the tax reforms are set to gain some \$1,860 each. If you do not like that, give it back to us. As a saying goes, “put your money where your mouth is”.

Our Government is including everyone in the growth whether they are low salary earners or those on a higher scale. This does not mean that those in the informal sector will not benefit. There will be more money in the pockets of the people as a result of tax savings. This money will not stay in their pockets, they will share it with those people who sell vegetables and crabs on the roadside, and they will buy more cars, providing work to the mechanics and the tyre repair boys. This money will not stay in their pockets, they will share it with those people who sell vegetables and crabs on the roadside. They will buy more cars, providing work to the mechanics and the tyre repair boys. It will have a ripple effect, which the Opposition just does not seem to understand.

Now, let us see what you were paying in taxes had it not been for this Government. The tax rate in 2001 and 2002 when SDL was in power only people earning below \$6,500 were exempt from income tax. In 2006, the tax threshold was slightly increased to \$8,840 which means that if you were a police officer in 2001 and earning \$10,000, you would be paying \$525 or 5 percent of your income in taxes. If you were a nurse under the SDL Government and earning \$15,000, you were paying income tax of \$1,775, 12 percent of your income was paid in taxes. If you were a school teacher earning \$18,000, the income tax would be a whopping \$2,525, 14 percent of your income was going in taxes under SDL.

The Opposition spoke about daylight robbery; that was daylight robbery. It is not going to happen under FijiFirst. If by some fortune you were earning \$40,000, you would be paying \$9,825 in taxes, 25

percent of your income was going in taxes. A quarter of your income went in taxes. At \$40,000, you are now required to pay just \$1,800, saving a massive \$8,025. If this is not a benefit, what is it?

In addition, to giving tax break, the FijiFirst Government has given salary increment to three essential sectors of the Civil Service. These are the Fiji Police Force which will have an overall increase in salaries of 15.5 percent, the specialist nurses will receive increases from 25 percent to 74 percent in some sectors, and our teachers will also receive significant increase in salary from between 13.8 percent to 14.3 percent. That is being made possible under this Government because our economy has performed well. These are the indicators of a strong economy. We have provided salary increment and tax benefit to those in the Civil Service and also the private sector. If we demand good performance that what is wrong with it?

Now, SODELPA is saying that they will give scholarships to all and include everyone in the economy. May I ask them, what was happening before 2006? I will tell you. Before 2006, the scholarships were based on race, even Civil Service appointments were based on race. The sorry state of our Civil Service is a direct result of that.

The Auditor-General's Report is full of cases where incompetent staff have been making the same mistakes over and over again. Cases of abuse, malpractice and I do not know how to do it. The FijiFirst Government's Civil Service Reform is geared to change that culture and make a positive change. It is not just about increasing the pay for civil servants, they must also deliver. This is no reflection on all the civil servants but we all agree that there are certain components of the Civil Service that needs revamping. Ask any member of the public how satisfied they are with the civil service and you will receive the answer.

What is wrong with merit-based appointments? What is wrong with putting people on contracts if they achieve productivity and performance?

A job in the Civil Service should not be seen as an avenue to build fortunes. It is a machinery by which the Government provides services to the public. It is a service which should be performed with noble intentions, that is why our civil servants need to deliver. All Fijians will benefit from an open merit system of Civil Service intake. We hear from the other side that if SODELPA forms Government they will give scholarships, they will improve TELS, they will provide free education, they will provide medical service, improve policing, et cetera. I say, in your dreams.

If they will increase the Civil Service retirement to 60 years, why was this not done in 1987 and 1999 when your leader who is outside Parliament was in power? My question to them is, where were all the good ideas when you were in power? Why when Bainimarama thinks of something, you say, "we can do it too". I say, keep on dreaming. With these words, Madam Speaker, I thank you for your indulgence and reiterate my support for the Budget. Thank you very much.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call upon the Honourable Minister for Youth and Sports to take the floor.

HON. LT. COL. L.B. TUITUBOU.- Madam Speaker, the Honourable Prime Minister, fellow Ministers, Honourable Leader of the Opposition and Members of this august House. Madam Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to respond to the 2017-2018 National Budget tabled by the Honourable Attorney General and Minister of Economy. I do so with a great deal of excitement as the proposed budget allocation supports my Ministry's changing direction and will enable us to provide better services to our youths and to the sports people across the nation.



Madam Speaker, I would like to endorse what my colleague, the Assistant Minister for Youth and Sports said in commending this pro-youth and pro-sports budget. It has clearly highlighted Government's ongoing effort to develop youths in an integrated way as Government will strongly advocate community based programs to provide youths with opportunities to develop life skills. We are helping them invest in their future and ours.

Our programs foster technical and life skills to sustain livelihoods. We also realise that a collective and a co-ordinated effort of both youth practitioner and educator is vital to ensure success. The contribution of this Government to youth development is not restricted to this Ministry but is embedded across several ministries which we welcome. In particular, the Young Entrepreneurship Scheme will provide much needed support for our young people as they begin their career path. It answers the question we often ask, "What next?" Our youths can now complete our accredited courses and go onto undertake an accredited diploma.

Madam Speaker, since we took office in 2014, both I and the Assistant Minister have visited well over 237 villages and youth clubs in the Western Division, 120 in the Central Division, 65 in the Northern Division including Kioa and Rabi Islands and close to 100 in the Eastern Division. For the Western alone, this includes 92 villages in Nadroga and Navosa, 95 villages in Ba and 50 in the Ra Province. Through these visits, we have been able to have *talanoa* sessions with the youth and to listen to their needs. Their participation in decision making at grassroot level is a vital component of our development. Youths must be provided opportunities and platforms to air their views and be respected regarding matters that concern them. This is in line with our Constitution.

We have listened and their input has been included in our budget request. We have heard on many occasions that youths want to know about climate change, we need to support youth who drop out of university, we need to address issues of inter- generational dialogue and educate my generation, we need to address multi-culturalism as well as violence against women and children. These are now included in our training offer to the youth with support from the Fiji Higher Education Commission, Climate Change Unit, Ministry of Education and various other NGOs and UN agencies, we hope to address these issues raised by our youths.

We have truly embraced the concept "reaching the unreached" over the past three years and have seen for ourselves the rural-urban drift in action, particularly, Madam Speaker, of young women, all searching for better opportunities. As a result, we are increasing our focus on supporting the urban youth and refining our programs to meet slightly different requirements of youth for training opportunities in both urban and rural areas. Working with the Ministry of Education, we will address those young people who drop out of our universities. All this will be reflected in the new strategic plan supported by the steady increase in our budget allocation.

My Ministry will bring more focus to promoting values and social cohesion. Madam Speaker, through youth and sports development, we seek to empower youth training through training opportunities relevant to their needs, with certificates of attainment not participation.

On the sporting front, we are already working more closely with the Fiji National Sports Commission and our National Sports Organisation to increase the mutually beneficial cohesion between youths and sports development. However, we should not forget that sports development is about all Fijians and not just for our youth.

The Ministry is committed to enhance integrated, holistic and a sustainable youth development. We are always conscious of the existing imbalance and current realities; we strive to build on the strong foundations of a non-discriminatory Fiji in which young people contribute effectively to nation building, realising their full potential through social, economic and political development and increasingly

addressing climate change issues where they build sustainable livelihoods in both the blue and green economy.

Madam Speaker, the Ministry of Youth and Sports is improving service delivery further, ensuring the holistic socio-economic development of our target audience while coordinating and supporting our stakeholders and developing partners, including the UN agencies. The Ministry's focus is on building the values that lead to success through investing in young people, through youth and sports development programmes. The Ministry provides training, support and infrastructure to the youths of this country to encourage development of leadership, entrepreneurship, gender equality, social and constitution responsibility.

As we expand our programmes to meet the diverse needs of our youth, we need to share best practices amongst youth to harness their energy, innovation and determination. Youth capacity building, empowerment and training are our strengths. The Ministry is the custodian of Non-Formal Education and we are making steady progress in this sector with the Ministry of Education's support. My ministry has organised a meeting and for the first time, brought together NGOs, CSOs, faith-based organisations and Government Ministries to establish a council to guide the direction and standards of Non-Formal Education in Fiji. This will be formally launched next month. The Ministry will continue to provide capacity building and empowerment training programmes encouraging youth to become productive and responsible member of our nation.

Madam Speaker, just over \$1 million has been allocated to fund income-generating projects; our Seeds of Success training, empowering training, Youth Feed the Nation programme and mobile skills training. We take our service to the youth where they are, this is real service delivery.

Madam Speaker, we recently revived our cooperation with the Fiji Correctional Services, conducting Seed of Success training to select first offenders at the Nasinu Correction Facility, as well as for young women offenders at Korovou. This programme promotes 12 values which contribute to an engaged and reasonable citizen. We are building bridges with vulnerable youth groups who are prone to crimes and risky behaviour. Through a grant from the International Foundation, we are introducing youth groups from Natokawaqa Housing Division to the Duke of Edinburgh International Awards, a non-competitive, fun, life-skills programme, so they can actively get involve in physical activity and community service. This, we are doing, in cooperation with the Fiji Police Force in the Western Division, with a sum of \$30,000 has been allocated for this programme and we hope it will increase the awareness and promotion of the programme to youth clubs and schools throughout Fiji.

Madam Speaker, we encourage good citizenry, civic pride and volunteerism. Youths make up the largest number of volunteers worldwide. A sum of \$200,000 has been allocated to our Youth Voluntary Organisation, training programme to encourage more youths to take up volunteerism and community work. As with everything, we will partner with NGOs and instigate cooperation to support the Fiji Sugar Corporation and Fiji Roads Authority as we seek to get more youths active. Indeed, many youths are already planting trees and mangroves, regenerating coral and picking up litter and this must extend across our country in support of Fiji's Presidency of the COP23.

In the spirit of cooperation, Madam Speaker, we instituted a successful programme of training, mainly young people basic carpentries skills in areas ravaged by *TC Winston*. This brought together the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation, the Technical College of Fiji and the Ministry of Youth and Sports. Through this, we have trained young men and women in over 48 villages to rebuild their homes. Now we are working on providing carpentry tools to enable this to happen as building materials have arrived and continue to be delivered.

Similarly, we will be meeting with the Honourable Minister for Agriculture soon to discuss and formalising our expanding cooperation. Our graduates from six months organic agriculture course will be guided and supported by the Ministry of Agriculture once they return home. This will also include investigating ways in which we can jointly ensure that young people recognise the importance of agriculture, not only as a profession, but as the key contributor to food security and our economy.

Madam Speaker, we all in this House need to promote farming as a profession. It puts food on the table through labour and other input costs, not only in the villages, but also communities throughout Fiji. Many young people regard themselves as unemployed if they are farmers, we need collectively to change this inaccurate perception, particularly as the average age of the farmers continue to increase.

Madam Speaker, in February, 2016, the Ministry recruited 14 Youth Administrators - one for each province. They have had an incredible impact and being based, where possible, in the offices of the Provincial Administrators. They have become an important extension of our youth and sports development network. They have become our ears and eyes on the ground and given the Ministry a positive reputation to responsive to youth issues.

Madam Speaker, the new budget provide \$195,000 for the recruitment of 20 district-based youth and sports worker. This will deepen our network and each officer will work directly with community to consult youth in urban areas and rural areas about their training needs. The other task that they will be carrying out is implementing that training, provide on-going support and monitor youth and sports programmes. These new initiatives will have a major impact in the Ministry ability to extend its reach to youths and currently accessing our service.

Madam Speaker, we have begun the process of reviewing the National Youth Policy to ensure that our service remain contemporary and cutting edge. Since the policy was established, technology has had a major impact on how we work and communicate. It is appropriate that we review the policy now and with additional funding, we will organise youth and sports conference in the divisions to consider new draft policy and to add value to our progress in addressing the needs of the youth. This is a complement by the establishment of National Youth Advisory Board to guide the work of the Ministry and we will be fully inclusive of our diverse but energetic youth.

To support more effective and accurate decision making, Madam Speaker, we are launching a new database in the new financial year. I have been calling for this as it will enhance our service delivery to all parts of our country. With additional allocation, we will be able to maintain the database and share information with other ministries and likewise we will share the information with us to support increased coordination of services.

Madam Speaker, I am delighted that just over \$1.9 million has been provided to upgrade our five training centres around Fiji. These upgrades requires to ensure our training programmes are accredited with the Fiji High Education Commission and that we provide our trainees the best learning environment. We are determine to ensure that our training centres are used 24 hours a day, seven days a week and 365 days a year to achieve the maximum return on investment. This means that we will be open to offer short causes, other training in the evenings and over the weekends for those who are near to our youth training centres, host conference and team building events throughout the year. The upgrades of our facilities are also used to provide our trainees with practical experience as part of the training course they undertake. This position them well for the employment market and reduce construction costs.

Madam Speaker, just over \$2 million has been allocated to the Rural Sports Complex programme to fund the completion of the construction of the rural sporting complexes in Vunisea, Kadavu and Sawaieke in Gau in line with the Government's long-term plan to establish modern sporting facility around the country. In addition, we continue to seek an appropriate site in Vunidawa. The first was

turned down by the engineers but we have two sites now ready for engineering and survey. This will give all athletes the opportunity to develop the skill in a wide range of sports. It will also provide opportunities for more fun days to be run to encourage increased physical activity to help us improve our mental and physical well-being and combat our non-communicable diseases epidemic.

Madam Speaker, without proper facilities, athletes and participants will not be able to excel in their sport of choice or to get more physically active. The ministry continues to develop rural sporting fields and grounds for schools and youths alike. A sum of \$500,000 is allocated to this programme, and this increase will help us to begin to address the backlog of over 107 requests for assistance. We will promote the construction of multi-purpose facilities to encourage all Fijians to learn and appreciate the full spectrum of sports available. We are working closely with the Ministry of Education to ensure that there is no double dipping and that we jointly encourage the increase of physical education in schools through this programme, and I am pleased, Madam Speaker, that the initiative of providing sports facilities in urban areas is being addressed with a focus on multi-sport and multi-purpose use.

My ministry stands ready to support the Ministry of Local Government and the city and town councils concerned. It is important that these facilities are fully accessible to persons with a disability and to all sports, and we will help Marshall support from the National Sports Organisations.

Earlier this year, we began to review the National Sports and Physical Activity Policy, engaging members of the public ensuring wider consultation for the first time. Madam Speaker, Government realises the positive impact sports makes on our nation. Sports and physical activity for all, play a key role in engaging citizens, confronting societal challenges as they promote better health, social cohesion and dialogue. We are promoting positive attitudes and the benefits of staying physically active.

Madam Speaker, we need to expose our athletes to top-level competitions as a measure of the progress they have made and still need to make. A total of \$4.6 million is allocated to assist teams and athletes' participation in overseas tournaments. Our teams are slated to participate in major events, including the 2017 Rugby League World Cup, 2018 Commonwealth Games, National Rugby Cup in Australia and the Pacific Mini Games in Papua New Guinea. We will continue to groom and nurture promising elite athletes and provide them with overseas scholarships and exposure.

Madam Speaker, apart from our participation at international events, the Ministry and Government continue to promote Fiji as a sporting destination. In the past 12 months, we hosted several internationally sanctioned tournaments, boosting our profile and capacity as a host, nation in the financial year, working with the Ministry of Industry, Trade and Tourism and Tourism Fiji, we will develop a road map for sports tourism in Fiji, to allow us to bid actively for world level events. This will add to the world events we are hosting, including the 2017 ITTF World Cadet Challenge in table tennis and the 2019 IWF World Junior Championships in weightlifting and the 2021 World Cup in netball.

To support this, close to \$3 million is allocated for hosting international events. This includes the Junior Pan Pacific Games in Swimming which will bring a number of up-and-coming swimmers to our shores, including from the USA, the Regional Games for Special Olympics and various Rugby 15s and the ever popular 7s international matches. Madam Speaker, Fiji will earn more revenue from hosting these events, which will surpass the investment made by Government.

Madam Speaker, my Ministry is also committed to promote ethical sporting behaviour. In elite sports, athletes are often tempted to use banned performance-enhancing substances. In recent years, my ministry has been working to strengthen the role of the National Anti-Doping Organisation. We are working closely with the Office of the Solicitor-General to finalise draft legislation to submit to Parliament next month. Once that legislation is passed, we will establish a formal National Anti-Doping Organisation and we have been allocated \$90,000 to support its growth in strength and capacity to serve

the needs of our athletes and those visiting from overseas. Ethical and fair competition is a key aspect of anti-doping but the other is assuring the health of all athletes.

Madam Speaker, as policy-makers for youth and sports development, we have a clear responsibility to foster unity in our diversity. A critical role is promoting social inclusion. Developing sports will have immediate social and economic benefits, not only through remittances but from having a more active and healthy population, reducing costs to our health system.

Madam Speaker, Martin Luther King Junior had a dream; but this Government has a vision for the development of our youth through empowerment and sport. I therefore, have no hesitation in supporting the motion before the House to approve the 2017-2018 National Budget. *Vinaka*.

HON. SPEAKER.- I call upon the Honourable Minister for Employment, Productivity & Industrial Relations to take the floor.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Madam Speaker, Honourable Prime Minister, Honourable Leader of Opposition and Honourable Members: Today, Madam Speaker, I would like to say that I am a very proud person. I am an over joyed person, I have a lot of joy that I can stand up here this afternoon to give my support to a budget that as for the people of this country.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. J. USAMATE.- Some of the things that we have heard so far from the Members of the Opposition is that, Government lacks the vision but I think Government's vision is very, very clear and it is embodied in the kinds of things that we have made sure are found in the Constitution. In all the socio-economic pledge in the Constitution, that is what this Government stands for. It is a Government that stands to build a better Fiji, not for only of those of us who live today, but those who follow us. All of our decisions, everything is based on that premise. Something that is for an ultimate benefit on everyone where ever they are in this country, male or female, whole bodied or not so whole-bodied, young or old, those who live today and future Fijians.

That is why, Madam Speaker, I am very, very delighted I can be here to support this and I must tell the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy that he and his team have done a wonderful job, for putting together this Budget that is for the benefit of all of our people and it is based on building the successes of our unprecedented. This is a term that we have said over and over again, "unprecedented economic growth" and mapping a future that all Fijians can benefit from and that remains true to the FijiFirst vision of building a better Fiji for all, not only for some but for every single person. On this side of the House, we do not demarcate according to race or religion or any other criteria. We are here for everyone in this country. That vision has not changed and the FijiFirst Government will make sure that that vision remains our guiding light.

(Hon. Member interjects)

HON. J. USAMATE.- Madam Speaker, employment is a global challenge. In 2016, the global unemployment rate stood at 5.7 percent. Our 2010 and 2011 unemployment survey had our unemployment rate at around 6.9 percent. I understand that the latest survey is coming out shortly towards the end of this month and I expect that that unemployment rating will have dropped from 6.9 percent perhaps around 6 or below 6. Even though in a makeup of our labour market, we have around 65 percent of our workers in the subsistence or informal economy, but all the indicators show that employment has been picking up. And this again is a direct consequence of the economic growth that we had if you grow your economy, if you have confidence in the economy and more people are investing in the economy, there is more likelihood of jobs being created.

The 2030 Agenda Sustainable Development Goals, includes Goal 8, which focuses on decent work, employment creation, social protection, rights at work and social dialogue, and all these are integral parts of what the ministry does at the Ministry of Employment and we will continue to focus on this.

In this Budget, if you look at the budget very carefully; economic growth forms the platform on which all the other programmes and initiatives are formulated and pursued. This is why the FijiFirst Government, as I have said before, boast eight consecutive years of economic growth and is likely to achieve 10 years of growth, if the Estimates come through for 2018-2019. Once again that is an unprecedented feat!

HON. MEMBER.- (Inaudible interjection)

HON. J. USAMATE.- As I have mentioned before, Madam Speaker, there has been a lot of talk about the national minimum wage and some sentiments have been expressed by the two Honourable Radrodro and few other speakers but I must say that, as I mentioned before, when Government tries to put together something on the National Minimum Wage, we are not just trying to appeal to popularism, we always think about the long-term effects of every single that we do and that includes the notion of National Minimum Wage.

The National Minimum Wage has been increased from \$2.32 to \$2.68 for the most marginalised workers in our society; that includes the people who are working on your *dalo* patches, the people who are looking after babies. If we increase the National Minimum Wage too much; what is the possible effect of this? These are the kinds of things that you have to think back, you cannot just come and bend here around the figure of \$5, \$6 or \$7, you have to think about the implications on our economy today and the economy in the future. Implication in terms of inflation, if you just double your labour cost over night, what happens to inflation? What happens to the competitiveness of the companies that employ people, especially at the Small and Micro Enterprises, will you be able to sustain it?

These are the kinds of issues that we ask ourselves, we cannot price ourselves out to the market. Also, Madam Speaker, when you are thinking about the implication of National Minimum Wage are now most marginalised, you also have to think about the other programmes that Government has put into place to help the most marginalised. You have got to look at the elements of social wage, Government has put up a system where we have targeted assistance for those who are the most marginalised. What am I talking about? Assistance for education, assistance for health, assistance for subsidising the electricity cost, subsidising of water, bus fare, all of these things. These are targeted assistance at the most marginalised. So Government wants to achieve two things at the same time, we want to have continued economic growth but make sure also that the most marginalised are not left to be squandered away. There is targeted assistance focused on them.

The Honourable Radrodro has mentioned the fact that she has just looked at the budget for the Ministry of Women and said that that budget is an indication of the fact that we do not pay attention to women, but you cannot just look at what is in one ministry. There are also things in other ministries; in the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education, Weet-Bix for the children, all of these things they are helping children. You have got to have a holistic view of looking at the Budget. You cannot just be focusing on one particular aspect and think that that provides the picture of the whole Estimate. So you really, really, really have to wake up and look at the whole Budget.

The Budget also highlights the importance of addressing youth unemployment that is categorised as those that are aged 15- 24 years and we know that globally this has been a major issue. There have been countries in the world where youth unemployment has reached up to around 40 percent, 25 percent in some parts of Europe. The latest estimates that we have here in Fiji that it was around 18 percent. We hope Government, through the programmes that we have and our emphases on education, their yes

programme that has been put into place for the development of micro and small economic enterprises that all of these things will give more opportunities for our young to be able to apply for employment for themselves.

The Opposition harps on and on about raising the retirement age to 60 but what happens to the youth entering the labour market?

HON. MEMBERS.- (Chorus of interjections)

HON. J. USAMATE.- Are you saying that you do not pay attention to the youths of this labour market, the youths of Fiji? The youths of Fiji are listening to this debate, this Government focuses on all parties, make sure that we look after the old ones and also the youths so that they come in and have opportunities for work, not just keep the jobs for those who reach the age of 55.

As we also mentioned, there is a lot of focus in the budget on education, on the Technical Colleges, on the work that is undertaken by the National Employment Centre, including the kind of programmes that we have, the technical colleges to make sure that we can have people with skills and competencies that allow us to work together to be able to grow this economy.

Our Ministry, Madam Speaker, during this budget will also allocate a total of \$400,000 for apprenticeships schemes, and this is a very important programme that works hand in hand with the technical colleges that are under the Ministry of Education. We need to make sure that our youths who are coming out through technical training programmes, they have the actual competence that allows them to perform at a level, and not just paper qualifications. The apprenticeship programmes allows a person to attend an institute of higher learning and at the same time, pick up competencies on the job site because a lot of these competencies are things that you cannot get just from institutional learning. So, the apprenticeship training programme will promote new skill development and also employment.

Under the Budget, Madam Speaker, as a one off start-up allowance to degree graduates whose income is less than \$30,000 and have registered with the NEC to assist in preparation for job interviews and buying appropriate equipment. This, once again demonstrates Government's commitment to the youths and the young of today that are entering the job market to give them the best possible assistance as they move into the world of work itself.

Our Ministry will work closely with institutions to ensure that we have a viable registration system that can be effectively used. In fact one of the work that the Ministry will carry out in this new budget year is the updating of our NEC database, to accurately capture graduates and employment data for future policy formulation and direction.

Increase wages featured strongly in this Budget, with the income tax threshold raised from 16,000 to 30,000. I think the Honourable Sudhakar had rightly pointed out the effect of raising the tax threshold on disposal income and how it will lead to changes in people's ability to look after their own families, to improve living standards, to improve spending capacities and try to make sure that there is more equitable sharing of the benefits of the growth that we have.

In 2010, Madam Speaker, the ministry had developed its National Employment Centre and over the years we have pursued programmes that contribute to developing a skilled knowledgeable workforce that will attract investment and open up job opportunity, and we are seeing the benefits of this and that is shown in the eight years of continued growth that we have and this has been strengthened by the reforms in the education sector: Toppers, TELS, the higher education programme, the work that is being undertaken by the Fiji Qualifications Framework under the Fiji Higher Education Commission to make sure that there is affordability of qualification so that we can reduce duplication of training and education.

Recent studies in the Pacific show that technology is improving productivity, entrepreneurship and financial transaction with two new potential areas for job creation; tourism and global outsourcing services that continues to be a growing area in Fiji. Job creation potential exist in Fiji in the area of global outsourcing and you have been seeing a growth of this over the past few years in Fiji.

Internet connectivity, which is something Government has invested on, infrastructure development, all of these will have to create the climate in which more jobs can be created so that we can have more growth in Fiji. These are areas that we can strategically pursue to grow local employment and we will continue to do so.

In job creation and promotion, we have to deal with labour migration and brain drain on the one hand and finding overseas employment opportunities on the other. In Fiji, the seasonal worker programme has been continuing under the National Employment Centre as a means to provide people who are out in the rural areas to have an opportunity to earn some income that allows them to improve their own lives and at the same time tries to prevent the problem of urban drift that we have been facing in Fiji.

This work has been strengthened by an allocation of \$4 million in our Ministry Budget for the work of the National Employment Centre. From this, under the foreign employment service and seasonal work programme, we will be undertaking more awareness programmes, engaging more overseas employers and increasing site visits to our workers in New Zealand and Australia as a budget has been provided for this. There will be two fronts, we will continue to look for employment within Fiji and at the same time find opportunities outside of Fiji.

Since the inception of this seasonal work programme, we have been able to send 767 workers to Australia and New Zealand. There are a lot of opportunities, some of these people, one that I met last week in New Zealand, in his first season, he was able to save \$20,000 that he took back to his rural community. So those are the kind of things that people can save when they go on the seasonal work.

Government is committed to pursuing employment growth and employment promotion through the employment creation services under NEC and local employment, including self-employment promotion, volunteer service and foreign employment. Under our volunteer service programme, we have been able to send volunteer teachers to the Republic of Marshall Islands, Kiribati, Tuvalu, Vanuatu and Nauru. We are looking to expand this into the area of sending curriculum developers as per the request and recently, will be looking also at sending volunteer nurses to Tuvalu. This offers opportunities for us to share work experiences with our neighbouring countries.

Under this Budget, we will continue to pursue as I mentioned before, foreign work opportunities and technical assistance, working with our foreign missions and stakeholders but keeping in mind that we also need to address the needs of our local employers.

Government has now got a strong emphasis on Micro Small and Medium Enterprises and this will continue to rise. We have programmes that have been undertaken by the Ministry of Trade where there have been more than 6000 entrepreneurs assisted with the grant funding of up to \$6 million.

We have also heard in this budget about the Youth Entrepreneurship Scheme that we will provide grants to youths that have good ideas that will allow them to grow jobs and also to grow opportunities for themselves and for their families.

Discussion on employment growth will not be complete without mentioning the most pressing issue that threatens human existence and that is climate change, and that is why we on this side of the



House are thankful that our leader, the Honourable Prime Minister is leading the charge on climate change, to make sure that life can be sustainable in the Pacific Islands, and I think we are all very grateful for that. And we are seeing also under this 2017-2018 Budget that there are many climate-sensitised programmes that support our COP23 programme, a role that our Honourable Prime Minister will be taking on in November in Bonn, Germany. Central to this discussion on achieving decent work is our transitioning to green economy and green initiatives in the face of climate change.

Madam Speaker, the 2018 ILO World Employment and Social Outlook focussed on the greening of jobs. In Fiji, we have adopted a Green Growth Framework, which is a commitment to integrating Green Growth into development efforts. A green economy of low carbon emissions, resource efficiency and social inclusion can help achieve sustainable development, create job opportunities and eradicate poverty.

The Asian Development Bank and the ILO report that in response to effects of climate change, an area of potential growth for the Pacific and Fiji is green jobs in the area of ecotourism and sustainable agriculture, and we have already heard from the Honourable Ministers responsible for both of these sectors talking about what they intend to do in those areas. Government is focussed on generating employment that is relevant, decent and contributes to sustainable development. Under the new budget, the Ministry will promote the advancement of potential in green jobs areas.

Madam Speaker, I would just like to get back to this issue of the National Minimum Wage in which a lot of people have been talking about. As I had mentioned before, about two-thirds of the population in this country are either working in the subsistence or the informal sector.

The wage increase from \$2.32 to \$2.68 per hour, as I have mentioned before, is for the unskilled in our society, those who do not have skills. Many more of our workers earn much, much more than that level of \$2.68.

We have also increased the wages for the 10 wage sectors. We have the National Minimum Wage and we have wages in 10 different sectors: building, civil and engineering, trades, hotel, catering trades, manufacturing, mining and quarrying, printing, saw milling, logging industries, security services, wholesale and retail trades, garments industry and road transport. In all these areas, the Wage Regulation Orders have also been improved and raised.

The exercise that we did to develop the National Minimum Wage was not something that we just dreamt under a mango tree. No, we collected data, we used 81 enumerators who collected the data on how peoples spent their money and how they were earning in Fiji. Working together with these group of people, we were able to get the data to make sure that when we put in a national minimum wage, it will be something that is sustainable. We also need to take into account the social wage components of what Government has already done, as I had mentioned before. Free education, subsidised medicine, subsidised bus fare, electricity, scholarships, all of these things need to be taken into account.

Madam Speaker, when they did the analysis and they look at working poverty-people, people who are working but still in poverty, this is the feedback from the people that we interviewed themselves. They found that the working poverty decreased by 70 percent. The social wage component was able to improve their lives up to 70 percent reduction in working poverty. That shows the effect of the total package of what we are doing as a Government, so it is not just something that we do in national minimum wage, it is everything else that the Government does, focussing on the most marginalised in society.

Madam Speaker, working poverty reduced from 34.8 percent to 11 percent. This is from them. Reducing working poverty by 70 percent, so obviously the social wage and what the Government has been doing this past 10 years is the most effective tool for reducing poverty. Those are not my words,

those are the words of the people that we interviewed on the streets in Suva and all around Fiji. The increase in the minimum wage has increased by 7.3 percent for inflation but the increase is more than 7.3 percent. So the real increase in the wage has been 8.2 percent, plus 7.3 percent which is more than 15 percent, so it does have an impact on people in terms of what they are able to do.

The minimum wage has been designed not to raise inflation, to make sure that we maintain our competitive edge, to keep our productive gains within Fiji and also to make sure that we continue to have a functioning labour market in Fiji and not to have ripple effects that will affect the wage rates of a great of people all across our country.

Madam Speaker, just a few things that I would like to say before I sit down. There has been a lot of harping on about Government debt. If you earn \$100 and you spent \$10 on butter, it is not the same as you spent \$1,000....

MADAM SPEAKER.- Thank you. I now give the floor to the Honourable Anare Vadei.

HON. A.T. VADEI.- Madam Speaker, the Honourable Prime Minister, Honourable Cabinet Ministers, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition and Honourable Members of Parliament; I rise to reply to the Budget address delivered by the Honourable Minister for Economy on the evening of Thursday, 29th June, 2017.

First and foremost, I wish to congratulate all my colleagues who have spoken before me, on their contribution to the Budget address. As the last speaker, I have been given the responsibility to provide a summary or snapshot of this side of the House's collective concerns in the 2017-2018 Budget.

The contributions today from Honourable Members the other side of the House, they mentioned about strategic paralysis. I believe they are haunted by this word and obsessed with it. Just a while ago, a wooden bridge in Maururu, Ba collapsed, cutting off the access to thousands of people. We had received confirmation that a truck went down with that bridge. This is the effect of ignorance by this Government that despite calls to fix it, no actions were taken.

Secondly, tractors in Keiyasi was without an operator. Thirdly and lastly, teachers were being removed from the Lautoka FNU Campus and USP. The intension was for rental hike, although there was a freeze in residential rentals. These are strategic paralysis obsessed by the FijiFirst Government.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. A.T. VADEI.- Madam Speaker, before summing up, I would like to take some time to comment on the allocation to the health sector. At the outset, Madam Speaker, allow me to enlighten this august House about the recent report highlighted by the World Health Organisation, that it will investigate the death of four newborn babies at the CWM Hospital's Neonatal Intensive Care Unit between 24th May, 2017 and 15th June, 2017, from suspected bacterial infection known as *Acinetobacter Baumannii* bacteria.

Madam Speaker, this is the first time the WHO is sending a personnel to look into the matter. It should be noted that this kind of bacteria as outlined by the WHO, is at the top on the world list of 12 deadliest bacteria. The only hygienic state of the CWM Hospital has become a breeding ground for this bacteria. This is a clear cut indication of gross negligence by the FijiFirst Government, the government that does not care for human lives and quality healthcare services in general. One has to visit any of the public hospitals in Fiji to see the sorry state, lack of basic necessities for in-patients, sheets, towels, blankets, pillows and cutleries had to be brought from homes. No wonder there is an increase in cross infection because the FijiFirst Government is unable to provide the same for patients.

Madam Speaker, allow me to dwell on the Ministry of Health and Medical Services budget. You will all agree with me that the public health system needs a massive overhaul. This would commence from the delivery of basic health services right through to the improvement on the fate of health facilities at all levels of healthcare services delivery; namely at the primary, secondary, and tertiary levels.

Madam Speaker, this is coupled with shortages and out of stock of lifesaving drugs, consumables and medical equipment to support a timely and efficient delivery of healthcare services. The problem is real, especially for our rural citizens outside the urban centres. Acute shortage of skilled health personnel, poor health working condition across the different cadre of healthcare workers is also contributing to the dismal state of healthcare services delivery being experienced today.

Madam Speaker, I wish to remind the FijiFirst Government that the dismal healthcare service delivery currently being experienced by the people of Fiji is your own making, so stop making excuses and putting the blame on previous Governments because the current Government, your Government, has been in power for the last 11 years, so stop the blaming game.

Madam Speaker, I wish to remind Honourable Members of this august House, especially the Honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services that Fiji once had one of the best health systems in the world. The referral system where patients are referred from primary to secondary and tertiary level, if required. The emphasis used to be on primary healthcare and preventative health, as a saying goes, 'prevention is better than cure' as it is always very cheap to implement. The emphasis is really on healthy lifestyles and healthy eating habits.

Madam Speaker, the health facilities were built to reflect the delivery of healthcare services from the three tiers mentioned above. In addition, the then policy makers at the Ministry of Health noted the limited resources at its disposal and through their foresight had predetermined the nature of healthcare services to be delivered at each level. Once this is done, appropriate staff, drugs, consumables and other medical equipment required to support the efficient and time delivery of services, will follow.

Madam Speaker, as you are very much aware, the primary healthcare services are delivered in nursing stations, health centres at early hospital level. Complications are referred to the secondary level at sub-divisional hospital levels. Further referral to the tertiary level at the divisional hospitals namely, the CWM Hospital, Lautoka Hospital and the Labasa Hospital. In instances where patients require more specialised medical care, they are then referred to overseas healthcare service providers.

Madam Speaker, we heard in the Budget Address that this Government will seek assistance from the Indian Government to seek bids for an international hospital company to run hospitals and provide enhanced tertiary care facilities and to provide state-of-the-art equipment.

Madam Speaker, what is the state-of-the-art equipment that the Honourable Minister for Economy is harping about? I beg the Honourable Minister to stop hoodwinking the people of Fiji. People do not need sophistication, all they need is efficient and timely delivery of basic healthcare services. As I had said before, Fiji has one of the best health systems in the world, the referral system.

Madam Speaker, I call on the Honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services and appeal just to strengthen the current system and make improvements where necessary. One of the many important aspects of the referral system is that, the health facilities are to be in good working condition, well-resourced and be conducive to support efficient and timely delivery of healthcare services.

Madam Speaker, I note that the construction of the Rewa Subdivisional Hospital in Nausori appeared in 2016-2017 Budget but does not appear anymore in the 2017-2018 Budget to be implemented in the next financial year. Madam Speaker, any health personnel, including your good self can vouch

that this is a very crucial capital project. Nausori Town is the heart of activities and a crossroad for Fijians from the three big provinces in Fiji, namely; Tailevu, Naitasiri and Rewa respectively.

The construction of Nausori Subdivisional Hospital is very critical in reducing and easing the burden for CWM Hospital. After its completion, it will be a referral hospital rated secondary level for patients from health facilities as far as Wainibuka, Tailevu North and South, Rewa and greater Nakasi and Davuilevu areas.

Madam Speaker, one may wonder where that money had been allocated and approved gone to. I am sure that has now contributed to the \$998 million to the so-called Government savings. I want to put it into proper perspective that it is not savings *per se*, it is advantage inefficiency to the implementers of the capital projects and other budgetted programmes that were incomplete, and some were never implemented at all. Lest we forget this is the output-based budgeting process where budgets have already been determined and approximate costs are affixed accordingly. Therefore, there should be no savings at all if projects are fully implemented as budgetted.

In addition, Madam Speaker, St. Giles Hospital is long overdue for its relocation. If the Honourable Minister for Health and Medical Service is serious in addressing the need for mental health services in Fiji, may I suggest to the Honourable Minister for Economy that a state-of-the-art mental hospital should be built. It needs to be relocated where rehabilitative therapy can be undertaken to include areas for gardening, sports, exercise, small businesses undertaken for patients as in bakery, flower arrangements, et cetera.

Madam Speaker, another interesting component of the capital budget is the extension of the CWM Hospital Maternity Unit and we all know the congested therein. It will be interesting if the Honourable Minister for Economy enlighten Honourable Members of this august House where this extension will go, whether into the Gynaecology Building up at Waimanu Road, meaning the closing the portion of that road and diverting traffic elsewhere.

Madam Speaker, I would suggest that since the Rewa Subdivisional Hospital has not been constructed yet, it would be appropriate if Government build another state-of-the-art maternity unit at the proposed Rewa Subdivisional Hospital in Nausori, to ease congestion at the CWM Hospital Maternity Unit.

Madam Speaker, on free medicine, may I remind this august House and the Fijian people that this is not a new initiative as medicines are usually provided free from the Government in previous years and I wish to commend the previous Governments for this provision.

Madam Speaker, the retail pharmacies are only conduit for supply of the so-called 172 free cheap generic drugs that are supplied free by the Government, free pharmaceutical services, et cetera and one wonders of their efficacy.

I have been rapidly informed, Madam Speaker, that patients usually prefer to buy alternative drugs, instead of all those free generic medicine as in their own words, they do not work. I am sure that the substance amount of these free generic drugs had expired on the shelves. There again, a waste of taxpayers' money. It would be interesting if a study is undertaken to assess the success of this programme.

Madam Speaker, with the \$26.7 million allocated for the so-called free medicine, it would be better utilised if medicines are sourced from reputable pharmaceutical companies with proven efficacy and complied with the British Pharmacopoeia BP and USA FBA standards.

Madam Speaker, I beg that these lies should be stopped once and for all.

(Laughter)

We have had enough of lies and more lies, stop telling lies!

Madam Speaker, I strongly believe that demographic health service surveys need to be undertaken to determine the health status of all the people of Fiji, including incidences of disease burdens in each geographical divisions namely Northern, Western, Eastern and Central Division. It is noted that some ad hoc survey had been undertaken in the past.

It is noted that the funds allocated for NCDs and CDs and other related programmes are not adequate and the result of the proposed demographic health survey will be a good indicator for allocation of funds to combat disease burdens and other health challenges faced by the Ministry and the people of this country.

High incidences of diabetes is worrying as their complications is evident in the increase in renal failure and if not addressed early, will eventually lead to complete shutdown to the renal failure and leads to renal dialysis, which is a very painful and expensive exercise, thus will drain a lot of health resources. Therefore, Madam Speaker, may I suggest to the Honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services that it should invest in a social health insurance scheme for all to supplement annual health budget to support the efficient delivery of specialised healthcare services.

Access to quality health services is an individual right. Madam Speaker, diabetes have to be stopped and I propose that village nursing programmes be strengthened as they can be used to educate villagers on healthy living and healthy eating habits. Therefore, more funds should be made available for primary healthcare services as it is here within and cheap to nip the problem in the bud, than to cure it. What the people of Fiji need is an efficient and timely delivery of primary, secondary and tertiary healthcare services and a social health insurance for all Fijians.

Madam Speaker, 2017-2018 Budget is a deceptive, extravagant, irresponsible and vote-buying Budget. That is devoid of providing the most needed employment creation that would drive the economy towards sustainable goal and development. This Budget fails to address our low wage economy, however, Madam Speaker, it only provides benefits to only 20 percent of the population, those who are already well-to-do in our society.

With this budget of \$4.3 billion, the SODELPA Government will free Fiji from the trap of low wage economy and sustainable debt level, discretionary fiscal policy, poverty trap, unequal distribution of wealth, dependency syndrome, scrap contract appointments for civil servants, increase the retirement age from 50 years to 60 years.

SODELPA cannot understand FijiFirst when they say the tourist service tax as proposed by SODELPA will not benefit the workers in the tourism industry, crime and unemployment, and the list goes on.

With those words, Madam Speaker, I strongly oppose the Bill before the House.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now give the floor to the Honourable Samuela Vunivalu.

HON. S.B. VUNIVALU.- Madam Speaker, the Honourable Prime Minister, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Government Ministers and Honourable Members of Parliament; may you allow me to quote from the Bible.

In Proverbs 16: 3, says and I quote: “Commit to the Lord whatever you do and he will establish your plan”. We, in FijiFirst always believe in this Proverb, so we have a plan. This year, Madam Speaker, there are seven of us here but our plan is to keep on increasing the chair.

(Laughter)

We commit to the Lord.

To those of listening around the country and around the world, in 2018, there will be 40 seats for the FijiFirst, in 2022 there will be 50 and only one opposition.

(Laughter)

Madam Speaker, I was supposed to talk about the Military and the Police, but this year my topic has changed and it is one of the new ones.

First of all I would like to respond to Honourable Ratu Naiqama Lalabalavu as he wanted to bring back the Great Council of Chiefs as he mentioned yesterday. Madam Speaker, when we install a chief in our village or in our *tikina*, we have to consult the Veitarogi Vanua or iTLC who is the rightful owner because at the moment, there are people who are not chiefs, they also want to be chiefs.

(Laughter)

Madam Speaker, when we install the chiefs we say in Fijian; “*Na Turaga sa mai vua na Kalou*”, meaning that the chiefs are from the God.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBER.- Amen!

HON. S.B. VUNIVALU.- Madam Speaker, they might be saying ‘Amen’ but when we install a chief, what we do we build a good house, we have to build a mount, put all the stone around it and build a good house and we say; “*Va’aturaga tu i...*”. The name of the house, we do respect. The chief is supposed to be there in their residence respectively and not here. Some of the chiefs depend on their spokesman, their *matanivanua*, and their warriors. No! They are supposed to be there and talk to their people so that there is no crime, no planting of *marijuana*, et cetera.

(Laughter)

And secondly, the *Talatala* should be concentrating on preaching in the church and not here. You cannot serve two masters, like the priest or the *pundit* in the temple. In the FijiFirst, there is no *talatala*, no chief we are just normal politicians. That is why next year, we will move closer that side.

Madam Speaker, I stand today in support of the 2017-2018 Appropriation Bill which was presented by the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy on 29th June, 2017. I stand on behalf of the farmers, rural youth and small business enterprises to support the Government initiative to standardise the stalls for the roadside vendors around the country.

This is a new initiative. That is why I mentioned that I had jumped from the Police and the Military to this.

Madam Speaker, the Ministry of Economy and its staff went around Fiji – Viti Levu and Vanua Levu, for consultations with stakeholders – schools, universities, villages, et cetera, to get their views.

This was not just prepared at Suvavou House. The views from the people of this nation has contributed to this Budget.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. S.B. VUNIVALU.- Not only from Suvavou House, Madam Speaker.

Their views and FijiFirst views are mixed together and that is why it is one of the best Budget so far.

(Laughter)

Madam Speaker, we have all seen roadside stalls along the highway and along villages. I feel for them, because these stalls are old and poorly constructed, and is there just to give shelter to the vendors. In many places, these stalls are not able to protect the vendors or the product they are selling from the weather conditions and in some places, farmers sell farm produce on the footpath and some days even sit on the shop veranda and sell their produce.

Madam Speaker, this new initiative to build standardised stalls will assist farmers and vendors, who sell their farm produce on the roadside and will also encourage farmers and youth who wish to start small businesses to help in improving their living standards. This roadside market will be constructed to build standards to make it durable and longstanding and that is safe and secure for sellers.

Madam Speaker, the FijiFirst Government recently built premises for female market vendors, who normally come from villages. Now, women who live along the highway can now sleep in their own homes and sell by the roadside. Farmers from like Wainibuka, Sawakasa, Verata, Nausori, Korovou corridor will be able to sell by the roadside.

Madam Speaker, some of the farmers from Northland and Naitasiri have to hire carriers to bring their produce and after selling their produce they hire carriers again and when they reach home they have no money. Similar issues along the Coral Coast and Nadroga towards Nadi, Bukuya, and in the upper highlands of Nadi, and towards Ba, Tavua, Rakiraki and in Vanua Levu too.

Madam Speaker, no one has ever thought about this new initiative, but through this leadership of the Honourable Prime Minister, no wonder the people of this nation always support the FijiFirst Party. This new initiative will promote new sellers who are also concerned about hygiene and quality of products and services that they provide. Madam Speaker, this initiative is a step further from the assistance provided to market vendors to build new markets.

Madam Speaker, new construction of roads around the country has enabled farmers to transport their produce to the urban towns and cities to sell in the markets. This initiative has provided every Fijian the platform to participate in the economic growth of our country. This initiative has enabled to connect farmers directly to consumers.

Madam Speaker, the construction of the standardised new market stalls will look uniform and presentable. As we all know consumers today are very selective in choices and packaging of products and marketing of goods contribute to sales and profit. This will also create a link between urban dwellers, farmers and food producers to sell products of farm origin and associated value added direct to consumers.

Madam Speaker, to conclude, there is a saying from the FijiFirst:

“A square has four ends;

A triangle has three ends;  
A line has two ends; but  
The cycle of the FijiFirst leadership to the people of Fiji, has no end.”

With those words, Madam Speaker, I fully support the 2017-2018 Appropriation Bill, and I believe this is one of the best budgets and it has been proved by the nation as well as the Opposition.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call upon the Honourable Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation to have the floor.

HON. M.R. VUNIWAQA.- Madam Speaker, I rise to applaud and congratulate the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy for the Budget before this august House. I also take this opportunity to thank my Permanent Secretary, Dr. Josefa Koroivueta and his hardworking budget team at my Ministry, and also the Permanent Secretary and officers of the Ministry of Economy who helped us as a Ministry put together and achieve the highest budget ever recorded for my Ministry since inception.

Madam Speaker, for the budget before this House, my Ministry has received an increase of 70.3 percent from the current year's budget and I thank the Honourable Minister of Economy for this unprecedented allocation. That is why, Madam Speaker, it really baffles me when the Members of the Opposition attacked the budget so passionately. I ask the Opposition Members “do not let the strategic paralysis that Honourable Minister for Agriculture has been talking about, not let that paralysis suppress the truth.”

Madam Speaker, the Budget is a strong reinforcement of the FijiFirst Government's will to keep building upon a more empowered, stronger, more inclusive, cohesive and a smarter Fiji. It is a compassionate budget, it is an empowering budget, it is visionary, it is a budget that is cognisant of ground realities in Fiji, and when we look at the budget for my Ministry, Madam Speaker, we can clearly see the will to empower Fijians, particularly those Fijians who need us to invest in them; women, children, the elderly, those living with disabilities and those living in situations of poverty.

Madam Speaker, the centre of attention of the Fijian Government is the people of our nation, for we believe that we are stronger when we empower and invest in our women, children, in people living with disabilities, the senior citizens and disadvantaged Fijians.

Madam Speaker, the trust of the Fijian Government to my Ministry for an allocation of \$113.4 million which is \$46.9 million more than our current budget is a clear signal to deserving Fijians on the social protection programmes that their livelihoods do matter. It is a signal that this Government is cognisant of the fact that we cannot truly advance as a country if some Fijians are lagging behind. It is a consistent realisation of the promise by the Honourable Prime Minister, “Do not let any Fijian behind.”

Madam Speaker, the Social Protection Programmes of \$92.05 million comprise 85 percent of our total budget. It brings us comfort to know that the increase in Social Protection Programmes will benefit 25,000 families already on the Poverty Benefit Scheme, over 4,000 households on Care and Protection Programme, almost 26,000 senior citizens on Social Pension Scheme and over 2,000 expectant mothers under the Extended Food Voucher Programme.

Madam Speaker, it therefore deeply concerns me as the relevant Minister when I hear from the other side an allegation that the increase in the Social Protection Programme budget is a result of the early retirement age and changes to the regulation of FNPF. Madam Speaker, that statement is a gloomy preview of the Opposition's mode of operation for elections campaign.



Statements made and so carelessly thrown out into the public space without any thought put to its accuracy. Statements geared to turn the noble deed of assisting women, children, the elderly, those living with disabilities and those living in situations of poverty into a political football. Statements that pay no regard to facts.

Madam Speaker, the new items of expenditure in the budget which increases the Social Pension Scheme from \$50 to \$100 a month for those eligible 65 year olds and over, the budget for the renovation of State-run homes for the elderly and the budget for the purchase of special care equipment for the elderly all point towards the attention being given by Government to elderly Fijians.

The National Budget allocation for elderly citizens of Fiji ensures that the age beneficiaries remain relevant in the current developmental discourse. It ensures that they are not left behind in nation-building and development.

Madam Speaker, the Expanded Food Voucher for rural pregnant mothers will have an increase from \$30 per month to \$50 in this new budget. This increase in allowance will continue to encourage our rural pregnant mothers to book early for ante-natal clinics and assist them in getting proper nutrition during pregnancy.

Madam Speaker, for the first time in the history of our country, there is now a stand-alone disability allowance with a budget of \$7.9 million. This allowance aims to assist in the care and protection of those Fijians living with a 100 percent disabilities. With this in place, along with the increase in budget allocation for the FNCDP with an estimated total of \$1.1 million, \$0.5 million to assist NGOs that are working with persons living with disabilities and \$850,000 to Hilton Special School for early intervention, we as a Government and as a nation will be a step closer to realising our national and international obligations on the rights of persons living with disabilities.

Madam Speaker, this budget allocation is not only about fulfilling national and international obligations on the rights of persons living with disabilities. It is about compassion, empowerment, empowering not only the beneficiaries but also their loved ones who look after them every day. It is about helping them live a dignified life. The new disability allowance will cover more than 7,300 people living with disabilities with the entitlement of \$90 a month.

Madam Speaker, the increased budget allocation for the welfare and protection of children and the new allocation for the renovation and expansion of the Juvenile Rehabilitation Centre show Government's holistic approach to child welfare. We have not and will not forget Fijian children who have fallen on the wrong side of the law. This Government believes that these children, if given the right support, and mentoring programme at the Juvenile Centre can still turn their lives around to become productive members of society in their adult lives.

Madam Speaker, in addition to the budget of the operation of the Department of Social Welfare, we have also been allocated a budget for the administration and operation of the Poverty Monitoring Unit which became part of my Ministry in 2015. With the new budget, the Unit is looking at an innovative and productive workforce ready to deliver Ministry's targets and outcomes aligned to Government's key priority areas.

For this fiscal year, an allocation of \$10,000 has been included for training and development which will assist in the provision of training and development for staff in the areas of monitoring and evaluation, project management and report writing to enhance capacities and contribute towards organisational development in the area of monitoring and evaluation.

My Ministry, Madam Speaker, is also very pleased with the Budget increments towards Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women Programme based with the Department of Women for the new fiscal year. Working towards gender equality and empowerment of women is a collaborative effort and Government intends to strengthen the efforts in a coordinated manner working with its stakeholders drawn from Government, Non-Government Organisations, corporate organisations and UN agencies.

Madam Speaker, the 2017-2018 Budget reaffirms the FijiFirst Government's commitment to the empowerment of women with a boost of approximately \$4.4 million for the Department of Women. This allocation will enable the Department to continue with the implementation of Fiji's National Gender Policy and carry out other planned programmes and activities which focus on empowering Fijian women and girls by providing them with the ability to participate equally and equitably towards national development.

We can now more effectively implement compulsory gender training for new and existing officers in the Ministry which is necessary for efficient service delivery within the Ministry. To strengthen the work undertaken in the implementation of the National Gender Policy and the Women's Plan of Action, we can focus on re-establishing and strengthening the Interagency Taskforce on the four thematic areas including Women and the Law, Access to Services, Equal Participation in Decision-Making and Formal Sector Employment and Livelihood.

Madam Speaker, the Government will continue to capitalise on the success of the National Women's Expo to link women artisans to markets and further strengthen financial returns to Fijian women entrepreneurs. This is further recognising and building from the success of the previous Expos, building confidence, business skills and the production of Fijian Made products which further links to accessing the Fijian Made/Fijian Crafted licences. Stronger collaboration between my Ministry and the Ministry of Trade and Tourism will further enhance the economic empowerment of Fijian women.

Madam Speaker, Non-Governmental Women's Organisations compliment the work Government is doing at advancing gender equality and empowerment of women. Government will provide financial assistance (\$200,000) to two reputable women's organisations - Makoi Vocational Centre and Ba Women's Forum.

For the information of this august House, Madam Speaker, 240 women had graduated from the Makoi Vocational Centre since it started operations in 2016. For the Ba Women's Forum, we are talking about 64 women's group with about 800 members who benefit from such funds, Madam Speaker. This demonstrates great commitment towards the capacity building of women through practical and strategic training within the centres, also in recognition of the role that Non-Government Organisations play in our communities. Government has allocated \$150,000 as NGO grants to enable them to continue and address the interest of women and girls in our country.

Madam Speaker, we do not work in isolation, we work with Non-Government Organisations, and we work with other Ministries to achieve a holistic strategy on the empowerment of women. Therefore it is an advice to Members of the Opposition who continue to attack the budget of the Ministry of Women saying that it is not enough. That simplistic way of looking at our budget, Madam Speaker, pre-supposes that women live in silos, that we live in isolation. Every woman in this House including all the women in this House, we are mothers, we are wives, we are grandmothers. So when Government empowers a child to go to school without having to pay his or school fees, when Government empowers a child by giving the child free breakfast in school, a mother is empowered, a sister is empowered, a daughter is empowered. When Government builds a road through a community that did not have a road before or tarseals a road that was not tarsealed before, thousands of women living in those communities are empowered. The same goes for the linking of water sources to communities, street lights, footpaths, all these empower women in the various facets of life that they live in.

HON. GOVT. MEMBER.- (Inaudible interjection)

HON. M.R. VUNIWAQA.- Exactly.

So I ask the House, we are now venturing onto election campaign mode and one of the things that is usually used in these campaigns is targeting budgets. Let us not target budgets in isolation, let us open up a myopic vision and see what Government is doing holistically in every area of development in this country.

Madam Speaker, my Ministry also thanks and welcomes the initiative announced by the Honourable Minister of Economy at the Budget Address, which aims to engage and involve women in the production of substitutes for plastic bags. This is a fine example of collaboration and a united effort for empowerment of women and our national aim towards a greener economy.

The allocation of \$200,000 for the management of the Domestic Violence Toll Free Line, Madam Speaker, will also ensure the ongoing management of this crucial service to victims of domestic violence by the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre through a partnership with my Ministry.

Madam Speaker, the social protection investment focus of this budget cannot be over-emphasised. We can sit here as Parliamentarians and particularly as Members of the Opposition and second-guess Government on this unprecedented social protection investment. We can call it an election gimmick, we can call it extravagant, irresponsible and deceptive. We can allege that the increase in the budget this year is due to the lowering of the retirement age almost a decade ago and changes to the FNPF policies without any data whatsoever to support it. It is easy for the Opposition to rubbish the Help for Home Initiative as a waste of money. Honourable Prasad I am very sure that those 36,000 Fijian people who have benefited from the Help for Home Initiative will not agree with you on that count.

Madam Speaker, the reality is this, the reality is that social protection is not a free pass. It is not a handout, it is an investment in inclusive growth. It is an investment in Fijian people who simply need a small nudge to help them be self-reliant, removing them from isolation and bringing them into the fold of nation building and development. Government is investing in our people through the social protection investment.

Madam Speaker, the Fijian people have spoken through this budget. Everyone in this House is aware of the extensive consultations that were carried out by the Honourable Minister of Economy and his team during the Budget preparation phase. As Fijians living in rural communities raising issues pertaining to access to Government services and other matters which the Fijian people thought important to address in this Budget, consultations with youths, with children, women, and people living with disabilities, those requests, Madam Speaker, and those concerns are now in the Budget that is before this House. And that is why, Madam Speaker, I ask that we support this Budget because a vote against this Budget means a vote against the pleas of ordinary Fijians. A vote against this Budget means a vote against the empowerment of our Fijian women, children, those living with disabilities, the elderly and those living in situations of poverty. A vote against this Budget is a vote against Fiji, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, in closing I wish to assure this august House of my Ministry's commitment to execute the expected outcomes, key performance indicators and outputs in the new fiscal year and to help leave no Fijian behind. I thank you Madam Speaker and I fully support this budget.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you Honourable Members. We will now break for refreshments and resume at 4.40 p.m.

The Parliament adjourned at 4.09 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 4.40 p.m.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call upon the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister of Economy to speak in reply.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, as Minister of Economy, I rise to provide my right of reply to the 2017-2018 National Budget. I would like to firstly, Madam Speaker, thank the Permanent Secretary of Economy and her team for their dedication in helping and working together with Government to put this Budget together.

Madam Speaker, just a matter of interest, the average age of the people in the team including from FRCA is round about 35 to 40 years old. These are very smart, dedicated young people who are very patriotic about their country and actually had come with new ideas that actually is helping fit in with Government's policy.

Madam Speaker, I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the Honourable Prime Minister for his decisive leadership because none of this can be done – none of this. The eight years of unprecedented growth rate now projected to be 10 years of unprecedented growth rate would not be possible without a decisive leadership, without a leadership that is strong and committed to principles and do not compromise. He does not compromise in the face of political expediency as the other side does, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, it is obvious that those on the opposite side have miserably failed to provide constructive comments in the resort to straightening the bottom of the barrel to find fault lines in the budget. Their rebuttal lacks vision, constructive alternatives and is clouded with rhetoric. The only thing that was consistent and common amongst the Opposition, Madam Speaker, was their own contradictions and inconsistencies. Some even contradicted themselves while speaking in the same speech while many on the other side contradicted each other. No coherence, Madam Speaker. Each playing their own tune; facts distorted, laughable and embarrassing statements. In fact, Madam Speaker, at one stage I was commenting to the Honourable Prime Minister, it is a bit embarrassing for me to actually stand up and retort to every single comment that they had made. It will take me four hours to actually get back to all of them with the factual inaccuracies.

There was obviously, Madam Speaker, just a sheer lack of understanding on basic economics, finance and commercial realities. Madam Speaker, many even were in disbelief and astonished on the quality of the Opposition we have in this Parliament who said this in the past couple of days.

Madam Speaker, let me very quickly highlight some of these inconsistencies that the Opposition alluded to. On one hand they have accused this to be an elections budget and on the other hand, they themselves are promising the moon, the sky and the sun if they come to power.

Madam Speaker, just their same old divisive, narrow-minded and short-sighted agenda. Some have even resorted to playing racial politics out of utter desperation to be on this side of the House come next year, Madam Speaker.

The Honourable Shadow Minister of Economy even went on to great lengths talking about the goodies the SODELPA Government will offer if they came into power. Let alone being in Government, Madam Speaker, I question whether the Honourable Member would be in Parliament next year at all.

Madam Speaker, each Opposition Member seems to have their own estimates of unemployment numbers and they completely disregarded official employment statistics. The Honourable Leader of the Opposition went onto say 46 percent of our population is unemployed. Other Honourable Members from the Opposition plucked numbers like 50 percent, 60 percent out of thin air, completely ignoring those

who are self-employed, our entrepreneurs, and those who drive this economy, Madam Speaker, were actually checking the figures with the Ministry of Labour or the Fiji Bureau of Statistics. These numbers are grossly overstated and no way close to the 6.9 percent official unemployment statics as the Honourable Minister highlighted earlier on.

Madam Speaker, then again on one hand, some of the Opposition Members claim that the Police budget is so high or too high and then others say the Fiji Police needs more resources. They need to make up their minds, Madam Speaker, and probably talk to each other and not embarrass themselves. They also try and implied the spending on Police, Military and Corrections is unproductive. Do we not need law and order? Do we not need the Police out in the streets to create confidence amongst our citizens and confidence amongst our businesses? Do we not need the military engineers to do the infrastructure in Rotuma, Lau, and various other remote parts of Fiji? Do we not need the assistance, and Honourable Maharaj highlighted very categorically, about they are the first ones who actually assist us whenever we have trouble (natural disasters)? Do we not need the Correction Services to reduce the rate of recidivism that they were complaining about? Do we not need the Yellow Ribbon program?

They are also saying that a large proportion of the total expenditure goes to these three disciplined forces. In fact, Madam Speaker, if they actually checked the figures, the Budget of these three agencies as a proportion of total expenditure declined from 7.4 percent to 6.5 percent in this Budget. Madam Speaker, 2016 and 2017, if you compare that to 2017 and 2018, it has actually declined to 6.5 percent of the total budget.

Madam Speaker, they completely seem to misunderstand our tax regime which is embedded on the principles of fairness, equity and simplicity. They claim our tax system is complicated and ridiculous version that we are over-taxing the economy. We, in fact, Madam Speaker, have one of the lowest tax rates in the southern region.

Honourable Nawaikula talks about, he said, "I look there and I look there" maybe he needs to look in the centre. This unfortunately, Madam Speaker, has led to a very deplorable contribution from the Opposition in respect of the Budget, Madam Speaker.

The Shadow Minister boldly claimed that only \$10 million is allocated for Civil Service Job Evaluation exercise. But, Madam Speaker, if he read the Estimates properly he would have known that in SEGs 1 and 2 we have actually budgeted almost an additional \$150 million for the Civil Service pay rise. They also stated in Parliament that the tax amnesty should be time bound. Madam Speaker, it is.

Page 89 of the Budget Supplement explicitly states that the amnesty will end on 31 December 2017 (this year). They should read these documents, Madam Speaker, before making such ludicrous assertions. They said, "We are trying to help some group of people here." If they look at it, it is where actually businesses and those people who earn less than \$1.5 million to help them be tax compliant. But it also, Madam Speaker, are trying to get those people who have their assets offshore, give them their amnesty to ensure that they actually declare their assets. Last time we did this, we discovered there was over \$500 million worth of assets offshore. Those people are now paying taxes on those assets.

Madam Speaker, they go on about "R". On one hand, they talk about "we need more accountability". What does "R" do? I feel like I am in déjà vu. Honourable Members may recall we had the same argument about two Budgets ago, they complained about "R".

The problem is they are personalising matters and I will discuss that later on. Madam Speaker, the whole point of having "R" is so that the Ministry of Economy ensures that money is spent properly and making sure that the money is spent in the right place. It is the Permanent Secretary for Economy

and her team through the Budget Division that actually assesses that. It's not like I sit there and say, "let's have all this money, it is mine." No one does that. They do not know how the system works.

HON. MEMBER.- It is nothing new.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Absolutely. It is nothing new. All Ministers of Economy have had that.

Madam Speaker, if they are doing, this is just a snapshot of what they have been saying, my advice to the ordinary Fijians, "please don't listen to these people. Not just now, but outside Parliament too. Don't listen to them next year or the year after that. If they have the audacity to make such wild assertions with the figures in front of them, God knows what else they will do."

Madam Speaker, they talked about minimum wages. It is only the Bainimarama Government that introduced minimum wages. No other Government has introduced minimum wages. There were ten sectorial wages but there were no minimum wages for unskilled people, and Madam Speaker, today the Honourable Prasad refused to comment on how much an hour he is offering for minimum wage. He is on record outside Parliament for saying \$5 an hour, Madam Speaker. When we pushed him to say what would be the rate, he did not say anything. Now he is saying he is maintaining that, Madam Speaker.

My point is, Madam Speaker, this is so unrealistic. As the Honourable Minister for Employment has already stated, the reasons why a \$5 minimum wage increase will be catastrophic. There are 130,000 Fijians who are self-employed. The person who is selling coconuts by the road side, Madam Speaker, that \$5 minimum wage is not going to affect him or her. It will not affect them. The 130,000 people Madam Speaker, earn their living that way. Some of them are mechanics, who are self-employed. How will they give themselves a \$5 pay rise an hour? It will not, but everyone else around them is getting that, the cost of that increase will be passed on to these people.

So, what the Honourable Minister has highlighted is that widespread public consultation is taking place. We have an expert who has actually looked at this. His also taking into consideration all the other necessary inputs that Governments has to ensure that those people with low-income families are actually able to get particular assistance like free education, access to electricity, water, subsidise electricity, access to subsidise bus fares and free medicine. All of these need to be taken into account, to ensure that we are able to have people living on decent income, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, the Honourable Prasad makes light to the Honourable Prime Minister efforts in the global level in respect of climate change, saying that he travels around the world but there are things to do at home. Madam Speaker, these comments shows absolute ignorance about climate change, its impact and its lack of respect for borders. Climate change does not respect borders, Madam Speaker. It is a global issue. It is a phenomena that put us in the cold place of climate change. Instead of making light of it, Madam Speaker, he should be of his amazing feat for our country.

We all in this House, in this Parliament, should be proud of the fact that we have a country the size of Fiji less than 900,000 people having the Presidency COP23, having the co-Chairman of the Oceans Conference. It shows, Madam Speaker, that Honourable Prasad will not in his lifetime be able to achieve what the Honourable Prime Minister has achieved, Madam Speaker. There is no way. None of them in fact can achieve them, Madam Speaker. No way.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, as I have said, if I were to highlight consistently all the inconsistencies, all the contradictions, all who have said this and the confusion the Honourable Opposition members have said, Madam Speaker, will take me hours.

Madam Speaker, you know the Honourable Prime Minister quoted Bill Clinton, the former President of USA, who went and asked about the key to political success and he said "it is the economist, stupid!"

Madam Speaker, I am sure if he were asked, what is the key to proper budget analysis he would say, "it is the figures, stupid!" That is what he would have said, Madam Speaker. The Opposition Madam Speaker, has put on a comical performance which has turned out to be great Greek tragedy as I have said in this Parliament before. With the frequency of this contradiction by those on the opposite, we should now literature this course, Madam Speaker, refer to as the Slow DELPA Federation tragedy. Not SODELPA, but Slow DELPA.

Madam Speaker, let me move on to the other pertinent issues. On our focus on the Budget, Madam Speaker, the 2017-2018 Budget built on the philosophy of the FijiFirst Government in ensuring inclusive and enduring development. That is why we are investing almost a billion dollars in the education sector, to enhance the democratic dividend to invest in our youths of this country. We care about our youths, Madam Speaker, because they are our future. There are 69.4 percent of the total population. They are the ones Madam Speaker who will provide us with the impetus, not just in the Civil Service but throughout our country, in terms of providing the intellectual input Madam Speaker.

We are continuing with our industries, improving our roads, bridges and jetties. We are improving local capacity and also in terms of capacity, for example in FRA, if you look at the Budget figures you will see how we actually give in more money to build more local capacity, ensuring knowledge for more opportunities to local and building resilience.

We are improving the airline connectivity, incentivising investment in the inter-island shipping. We have introduced whole package to encourage more investment and public transportation for new buses, taxis, mini buses and carriers. We will reduce duties long-term of permits up to 15 years, for buses and 10 years for taxi. Honourable Chand will know this as to how critical this is. The fact that they can now use those permits to be able to mortgage it, to be able to sell it, it will provide the new level of commercial and financial incentive for those holders of these permits, Madam Speaker.

The lifting up of the freeze, Madam Speaker, of course as highlighted by the Honourable Minister will be based on the quota system, but also we are saying now that those people who provide public service transportation will be able to get a 5 percent interest rate for those who come from small enterprise. This removing of the bureaucracy with unshackling of these impediments, Madam Speaker, will provide new commercial potential for all those businesses, including Honourable Chand and all members of the Fiji Bus Operators Association.

Madam Speaker, we are, through many of our organisations, through AFL we are going to extend the runaway in Taveuni. We are working behind the scene. We are going to put night lights in Labasa, Madam Speaker. All of that is being done but is not reflected in the Budget because AFL is doing it. It is now going to pay us a dividend of \$43 million - unheard of in Fiji's history that the state owned enterprise will be going to pay us \$43 million in dividends, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, we are not only investing in building fiscal connectivity but we are mobilising our resources to connect Fiji digitally to expand our broad bank capacity to give every Fijian an access to internet and digital television.

Honourable Niumataiwalu, when he mentioned that Honourable Vadei was saying bad debt. Madam Speaker, we are investing to ensure that the people in Vanua Levu get a 100 percent increase in the access to internet speeds. It will create jobs, it will give them connectivity. We are investing more towards building better health facilities, improve services through hiring more qualified doctors, nurses and specialist and increasing the teacher's student ratio.

Madam Speaker, we are building effectiveness and social protection that ensures that our vulnerable - our youths, the disabled, our women, the elderly, those who are in society are well protected. We have raised those allowances in this Budget, Madam Speaker, because we want to give them greater choice to truly empower them, Madam Speaker. We have raised income tax threshold for jewelleries and number of products raised a minimum wage, increase allowance to the tertiary students, double the social personal allowance, increase pension, expand the electricity subsidy, continue with free education, free water, free bus fare, free medicine, access to justice and legal aid Madam Speaker and yet the Opposition is in denial claiming that the Budget is inclined towards only the elite and the rich. The Budget very clearly, Madam Speaker and systematically sets out the target policies and programme internet to uplift the lives of the ordinary Fijians so everyone can share the prosperity, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, we will be eliminating the deficit of confidence which inhibited investments and that is why we have seen more confidence, more optimism and investment by the private sector both by domestic and foreign companies.

In equality, Madam Speaker, has dropped the Gini Coefficient shows that in the independent study, inequality in Fiji has dropped. We are only one of the five or seven in the entire Asia Pacific Region with inequalities dropped.

Poverty level have dropped, Madam Speaker, also and the new service will show that it will drop further.

Madam Speaker, the Shadow Minister characterises Fijis economic growth is weak and fragile. However he completely ignores the fact and even external verifications that when appear strongest and longest period of economic expansion never seen before. Something that needed the SVT Government nor the SDL government can close to achieving, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, our economy is not a roller coaster in slow motion but in fact is like a train in full steam.

Madam Speaker, I am surprised at the audacity of Honourable Prasad's claim that this Government lacks vision and economic plan. He is suggesting, Madam Speaker, that the economic growth is ordinary. As an economist, he should know, the economist does do not grow themselves. The Government has created a conducive environment with enabling policies and reforms and has brought the economy to where it is today, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, like the rest of the Opposition the Honourable Member, is also in denial of this. Madam Speaker, they make a lot of song and dance about debt. Let me explain the debt to them, Madam Speaker. The Honourable Shadow Minister blatantly misled Parliament, saying that this Government has added \$5.2 billion to Fiji's national debt, like it was mentioned by the Honourable Member who is of course what I call the "Johnny come lately to his sugar cane industry," he has got the sugar mill wrong, Rarawai is still open but Penang is closed, Madam Speaker. The Honourable Member seems to have lost his way in the Budget numbers too. We expected him, Madam Speaker, to be a lot more robust in terms of scrutinising figures himself, given that he is an Accountant, I understand.



Madam Speaker, the truth is this. The current debt level is around \$4.7 billion. The truth is that we have inherited a debt of \$2.9 billion at the end of 2006. The truth is that this Government is also repaying the debt to previous governments and Madam Speaker, this is beyond the comprehension of the Opposition that the dollar borrowed ten or twenty years ago is not the same as \$1 today. So, the \$2.9 billion of the debt inherited is equivalent to almost \$4 billion in present value terms.

We need to compare apples with apples, Madam Speaker and this is beyond, of course I understand, the intellectual aptitude of the Opposition. Further, to illustrate this point, Madam Speaker, the then SVT Government borrowed \$209.1 million to bail out the National Bank of Fiji (NBF) as we knew it in 1996 and 1997. This money borrowed in today's price, Madam Speaker is almost \$415 million. I repeat Madam Speaker, \$415 million purely because of mismanagement. Apart from this, the interest paid in today's value terms totalled \$200 million.

Madam Speaker, the total cost of this NBF saga cost the country a staggering \$615 million in today's terms, and we expect, and the Opposition too expect, our SODELPA Government, under the same leader who was the leader in the SVT when NBF collapsed, to lead Fiji to a brighter future, to lead Fiji to financial accountability.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- I am sure all Fijians are much smarter than what they are proposing, Madam Speaker. Under the leadership, Madam Speaker, of the former SVT Prime Minister, Sitiveni Rabuka, now leader of SODELPA, we lost our only national bank. Under this Prime Minister, Madam Speaker, we have regained our Fijian-owned bank, HFC.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- That is the difference. That is the marked difference.

Madam Speaker, let us now talk about the quality of Government spending. Unlike the past Governments, we are borrowing to build, to raise our productive capacity, to unlock our potential, to ensure inclusive and sustainable growth. To illustrate this, Madam Speaker, the total amount spent by previous governments on capital expenditure for the 26 year period from 1980 to 2006 was \$3.5 billion. However, we have spent more than twice this amount for an excess of \$7 billion in the last ten years. Madam Speaker, had we spend the same amount in capital expenditure as a proportion, we would have repaid most of the debts.

Yes, Madam Speaker, we would have repaid most of the debts, but as we said, we are borrowing to build. We are building roads and bridges where no previous governments did. We are spending more on education in the future of the country. We are spending more on health, more on social protection, we are spending more on the people of Fiji because we care about them, Madam Speaker.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBER.- More debts!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- You see, Madam Speaker, how absolutely stupid is that comment.

(Laughter)

Nabouwalu to Dreketi is now built. Will they have to go and rebuild Nabouwalu to Dreketi road? No. When they talk about the future, we are building for the future. Was there a road in Buca Bay? Was there a tarsealed road in Valley Road? Was there a bridge and a road in Moto in Ba?

There are more Fijians connected to electricity. The Honourable Leader of Opposition complained yesterday; why those villages in Wainibuka got electricity? Why did not her government do it? Why did not they do it?

The expenditure spend they had was only about 14 percent to 15 percent in capital, 85 percent they spend every year in just living up their government lives.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, we spent 59 percent on operating expenditure and 41 percent on capital; no other government has done that.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, Honourable Prasad highlights in isolation the debt servicing of Government and is trying to imply it is high. However, he fails to point out, Madam Speaker, that Government is borrowings are channelled towards funding infrastructure related projects which has the highest internal rate of return, in most cases 10 to 12 percent. As an economist, he should understand that the induced economic impact is much higher. Like as I said, Madam Speaker, our investment in Nabouwalu to Dreketi, where the Honourable Member actually comes from.

Madam Speaker, as we have said before and we will remind the Parliament again, there is nothing wrong with borrowing for the purpose of building for the future. Just like we borrow to buy or build our home, we are building for a stronger future. If we build now, we will have to build less in the future.

Madam Speaker, a lot of our capital expenditures was also due to neglect of past governments, we say this again. Both the SVT and SDL Governments spent less than average of 15 percent on capital expenditure. Honourable Ratu Lalabalavu said "I do not know what the AG is talking about - this expenditure mix." This is what it is. In contrast, as I have said, we have raised the bar and increased capital expenditure to 40percent, we now borrowed to fund our operating expenditure.

Madam Speaker, the previous governments had spent 20 percent of the expenditure on capital. We would not be required to spend what we are spending now. Given the past record in managing economy and the debt, can we trust them to build for the future of this country? It is a resounding no.

The proof is, as they say, in the eating of the pudding. Madam Speaker, that is why we are investing now so that our future generations do not need to build four lane roads. They do not need to have more water projects because we are doing it now. All of these things have been done now for the future. Madam Speaker, the most preposterous comment came from the shadow Minister for Economy when he asked, why is this Government borrowing, if we are having an operating surplus? Madam Speaker, to protect his dignity, I am not going to respond to that but I will have a chat with him afterwards, so I can explain to him in very minute details of how it all works.

Madam Speaker, there is another important point about debt which I would like to clarify. The benchmark on whether borrowing is sustainable or not is based on your capacity to repay. He should not just look at the nominal debt number which the Opposition is too obsessed with. It has to be assessed in line with the income and for a country it is your GDP. In this regard, Madam Speaker, our debt is more than sustainable compared to 2006. It is expected to be around 45.8 percent of GDP at the end of this fiscal year and projected 47.5 percent GDP at the end of the 2017-2018 fiscal year. This compares with the high of 53.7 percent in 1997 under the SVT Government and 53.3percent during the reign of the SDL Government.

Madam Speaker, the Honourable Shadow Minister also talked about the high interest rate on Governments borrowing by selectively choosing one external debt, one external debt. Let me highlight some key facts on cost of borrowing. The SVT Government borrowed 15 year bond in the domestic market, began in 1997 at 8.14 percent. The SDL Government borrowed 15-year bond in the domestic market in November, 2006 at 11percent and the FijiFirst Government is currently borrowing 15 year bond in the domestic market at 6.5 percent.

Madam Speaker, Honourable Salote Radrodro also highlighted, unfortunately she is not here, about our contingent liability position. In fact, the overall explicit contingent liability position of the Government is declining as highlighted in the last sitting. In 2006, it stood at \$688.9 million and today it is \$554.9 million as at April, 2017.

The Honourable Shadow Minister also buys-in this false claim of the build-up in liquidity is a sign of a weak economy. Madam Speaker, the truth is, there has been a general downward trend in liquidity for the past five years. The recent build up in liquidity, Madam Speaker, is due to the substantial increase in foreign reserves which stood at a record \$2.3 billion.

In 2006, the foreign reserves is a little over \$500 million. Today, it is \$2.3 billion. Unfortunately, the Shadow Minister's advisors needs to be educated on what includes liquidity in the banking system.

Private sector lending as at end of May 2017 accelerated by 14.1 percent on an annual basis. This is further validated by the data on our standing commercial bank loans, which increased from \$1.9 billion at the end of 2006 to \$6.5 billion, which is currently the figure. It has almost gone up five fold. To further substantiate this, new loans in 2006 was \$768 million and this has now exponentially grown to \$2.5 billion last year. It is a clear sign that the economy is growing. It is also a clear sign there is enormous confidence and optimism in the economy and the fundamentals of the economy and the fundamentals of the policy, Madam Speaker. No amount of facts will convince the other side of the true state of the economy.

All this data, Madam Speaker, is publicly available but the Shadow Minister and the other Opposition Members blatantly chose to ignore this. Obviously, there does not seem to be much change in the input from the former Shadow Minister and now the current Shadow Minister. The analysis is fraud, is deliberate, and whether it is deliberate or not, it is just like the basic understanding, Madam Speaker, I am not sure whether it is complete incompetency, but whatever it is, it is not correct.

Madam Speaker, prudent management economy means that monetary policy can support the economy. This means that inflation is maintained at low and stable rates and foreign reserves are more than adequate. The Reserve Bank can adopt the monetary policy stance that supports the economic growth by influencing the lending rate charged to borrowers. In this regard, let me highlight to the Honourable Shadow Minister and his colleague on the other side of the House that the lending rates under the Bainimarama-led Government and the FijiFirst Government has been the lowest on record. Just by comparison, during the reign of the SVT Government between 1992 and 1999, the weighted average commercial learning rate was around 11 percent per annum. In fact, it was as high as 12.46 percent in 1992.

Under the SDL Government, lending rates declined and was 7.9percent. Madam Speaker, lending rates have declined since we have been in Government. The weighted average lending is apparently is now 5.8 percent and that is approximately half of what it was under the SVT Government and under the new SODELPA leader.

Madam Speaker, I invite the Members of the Opposition to please check these figures. They are all available, all over the place.

Madam Speaker, the retirement age was reduced to 55 in 1987 when the first *coup* was carried out. The then Government, through a Decree, reduced the retirement age from 60 to 55. In the interim Qarase Government, it was then increased to 60. Madam Speaker, if you go behind the scenes, Honourable Prasad, if he is going to be honest about this would know why it was done. It was to get rid of people at that point of time post-1987 and, of course, in the SDL Government time, to keep people who were actually supporting them, in.

Madam Speaker, the Bainimarama-led Government in fact reduced the retirement age to 55 because we are purely concerned about giving jobs to our youth. We are purely concerned about getting the right level of intellectuals, about getting new ideas into the system, Madam Speaker.

A number of the Honourable Members from this side of the House, Madam Speaker, have actually spoken about the need for a professional Civil Service. I do not want to elaborate too much on that, however, Madam Speaker, one does not have to be a rocket scientist or able to know that if the retirement age is increased, there will be hardly any new jobs in the public service for the next five years. This means that the youths, who are our leaders of tomorrow, will find it tough to find employment in the Civil Service after graduation from tertiary institutions.

Madam Speaker, the Opposition has found a very creative way to create unemployment amongst our youths, do not even care about them or it is just simply political posturing, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, competent Civil Service actually welcome the reform in the Civil Service. Permanent employment is advocated by the Opposition breeds unproductivity, Honourable Sudhakar spoke quite eloquently about that. Why should we short change the Fijian public?

In the private sector, normally gets a job for life - three years contract, four year contracts to the max, they all get loans, unlike the representation they make. Everyone gets loan, you go and talk to all the banks, banks have already issued statement, these are all smokescreen stuff, all smokescreen, they are simply only concerned about getting their votes. We are simply concerned about, Madam Speaker, ensuring that the ordinary Fijian people get better services.

(Honourable Member interjects)

We are, Madam Speaker, concerned about getting the right level of intellectual input, smart people, people who can work hard within the Civil Service give new ideas as to how to move a country forward, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, the Opposition has weaved a web of confusion on the Civil Service Reforms simply because we pulled the rug from under their feet, including the trade unions, Madam Speaker. As I have said before in this Parliament, Madam Speaker, the trade unions in Fiji are simply driven by the public sector businesses. If you look at where the trade unions are mainly functioning. They sat on the enterprises or the Government's Civil Service? Are they out there trying to protect the rights of those workers who work as retail shop assistants? Are they there actively trying to protect the rights of the security guards? Are they there on the construction site to see if those people are getting paid the right wages?

The Ministry of Employment is doing that, but if they are concerned about it, is the Opposition talking about those people? They are not, they are not because, Madam Speaker, in Fiji unfortunately the culture of trade unionism has become a small cabal of people, who simply depend on dues paid by union members so they can continue with a particular lifestyle of theirs.

Under the guise of representing the ordinary workers. They are the ones who are talking about \$4 an hour, do they care about the people who sell coconuts, cocoa, vegetables on the roadside? Do they care about the single employment Fijians? They do not.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBER.- We do.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- They do not, Madam Speaker, including the Opposition they do not. That, Madam Speaker, unfortunately is the canard of the day. We were expecting that this Budget debate will be actually about the Budget. They started lecturing, so that has meant that the quality of contribution by them has actually being quite abysmal Madam Speaker. We have heard Honourable Prem Singh saying if the bus companies can get the 15 year RSL, if the taxi drivers can get a 10 years taxi permit, why can the civil servants not get that? *Areh*, to buy a bus costs \$300,000, to buy a taxi costs \$50,000 to \$60,000. When you get a civil service job, you pay \$300,000, they do not. No you do not, you provide a particular service you should protect their investment, what a preposterous analogy, Madam Speaker. This is the quality of input that we are getting from the Opposition, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, the FijiFirst Government is bold to undertake this reform. It is the Opposition who are trying to lure civil servants with permanent employment - clearly electioneering, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I do not want to go too much into that because my time is running out and Madam Speaker, I also want to highlight that no civil servant is worse off through this particular exercise.

Madam Speaker, they are only talking about pay rises, they are not talking about some of those nurses got about over 75 percent pay rise, about the other doctors, they are not talking about the level of technology that is now available to civil servants in their day to day jobs, they are not talking about the fact that we are building infrastructure to improve the infrastructure that they operate from has improved, they are not talking about the fact that the Civil Service the civil servants, the vehicles that they are driving now has actually improved using new technology, they are getting new training, they get exposure going overseas, they are not talking about any of that. They are not talking about it.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Nonsense, nonsense, Madam Speaker. It is absolutely nonsense because the level of training, they get even find out exactly what is happening, they would know, Madam Speaker, that, Madam Speaker, is a fact.

They are saying, there is only one year ten months - absolutely nonsense. Those people, Madam Speaker, who reached the age of 55, there is a provision in the regulations if they have a particular skill sets their contracts can renew for a year. We need succession planning in some cases, Madam Speaker, when succession planning is not there, their contracts can actually be renewed for longer period after the end of the year. Madam Speaker, Honourable Radrodro also made a comment saying that the reason why Honourable Vuniwaqa has longer queues is because of the pensions, civil servants are retiring. What a preposterous statement!

The pensions that we give, Madam Speaker, through the Ministry of Social Welfare, half of those Fijians who do not have FNPF. There are many villagers living in maritime areas, many villagers in Viti Levu, Vanua Levu, farmers who have never had FNPF, they have no form of social security, this is the Government that has introduced it.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- They have been now given a \$100, Madam Speaker, a month. These are the people, Madam Speaker, who need assistance; not those people with FNPF. See they do

not understand what are they talking about either they are deliberately misleading the public of Fiji or there is absolutely no will to go into the depths of the Budget, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, Honourable Vuniwaqa very eloquently stated what Honourable Radrodro talked about on how Women's budget is not reflective of what women are doing and how Honourable Prime Minister has made a commitment to women's rights and women's empowerment, et cetera but she is saying that it is all hollow, simply because the Ministry of Women is getting \$4 million. What a preposterous issue, Madam Speaker?

All I would ask her to do is please, ask your Leader outside of Parliament, what sort of commitment he has to women's issues. Ask him?

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBER.- We know it.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM. - What sort of commitment yet to women issues?

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBER.- We already know that.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- If you knew what I am saying - think about it. If you know what I am saying think about it, look at the budget allocation.

Madam Speaker, this is the kind of ludicrous analogy that these people are making, absolutely no understanding, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, in empowering the people of Fiji, in empowering the Fijian people, Madam Speaker, it is not only, Madam Speaker, about the budget itself, it is about the enabling laws.

The Domestic Violence Act, Madam Speaker, it was relishing, it was up on the shelves when we came in. The Fiji Law Reform Commission made a Domestic Violence Bill, it was up on the shelves gathering dust, and we picked it up, dusted it, tweaked it and actually implemented it.

The Penal Code, Madam Speaker, was changed. We are revamping other human rights and anti-discrimination laws, Madam Speaker, international convention relating to international sale of goods, electronic transactions, treaties to protect our environment, we are going to have the DOHA Agreement being presented by us Honourable Deputy Whip. Also brings me, Madam Speaker, to the ILO Convention they always go on about.

Honourable Niko Nawaikula talked about *Terra nullius*. *Terra nullius*, Madam Speaker, was applicable to Australia when the white surplus came to Australia, Madam Speaker, they said it was *Terra nullius*, which means the land belongs to no one, we can take whatever we want, every Sunday in Tasmania after church, and they went shooting Aborigines. The last Aboriginal Tasmanian that was Truganini.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Read your history. You want to talk about indigenous right, know your history.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA (Inaudible)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Know the law, you know nothing, you know nothing. Fiji is one of the very few places in the world, Madam Speaker, where you have a secular community where 91 percent of the land is actually owned by the indigenous people and it is protected in the Constitution.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- They cite New Zealand, let me tell you, Maori's own only 5.6 percent of the total land area in New Zealand. That is why they are getting compensation. You do not understand what you are talking about. You do not understand the law, you do not understand international convention. This is a proportion preposition. Honourable Ratu Lalabalavu talks about GCC, that is by way of regulation put in by the British. That is the fact! That is the fact! Do not shake your head, Honourable Nawaikula, that is a fact!

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- You see, Madam Speaker, the Opposition is playing cheap politics. The Rabuka Government ratified just for political gain - you know that. Come on, do not be ridiculous!

Madam Speaker, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition was Minister for Education. Last year, we heard, Madam Speaker, they said; "When we come into Government, we will actually get rid of TELS, everyone will be given free education at university." Today and yesterday one of them said, "When we come to Government, we will review it", because I think they begin to understand how much it is going to cost.

(Laughter)

Why did they not do it when the Honourable Leader of Opposition was the Minister for Education? Why did they not do it then, Madam Speaker?

They are playing cheap politics. What is their real intent there? I must say to all the youth in our country and there is one young man sitting there in the gallery who was there in the public consultations; "Do not believe the Opposition. Do not trust them because they are playing with politics." They never thought of this, no one talked about it, none of them talked about it.

Madam Speaker, do they again want to bring the old and divisive ways of allocating scholarship on racial lines? They want to do racial lines. So many times Honourable Members on the other side have asked the Honourable Minister Reddy what the ethnic breakdown is. What is your obsession with ethnicity? Do you not want to know how many doctors you have, how many engineers you have, how many counsellors you have?

They are obsessed with ethnicity, Madam Speaker, and I say that when you are obsessed with ethnicity, Madam Speaker, you are unpatriotic. You are unpatriotic to your country because you do not want to build your country. We must build the capacity in our country, Madam Speaker. People need to be appointed on merit. People need to be given scholarships on merit. We need to give people scholarship on merit because of our need.

Honourable Professor Prasad, so many times know this is the fact but because of political expediency, he will never speak out. Honourable Nawaikula, in the last session before the Budget, made all his racist comments, and Honourable Prasad never spoke up.

Honourable Kepa, the Honourable Leader of Opposition, when we introduced the Ministry of Economy and we say it is going to change from finance to economy.....

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Point of Order, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Point of Order.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA. – “I made racist statements”, I want him to withdraw that. I did not do that.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Yes, you did.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- I did not make any racist statement here.

HON. SPEAKER. - I am not be able to make a ruling on that until I see the Hansard Report.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Madam Speaker, I am asking him to withdraw that because I did not say that.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- I will not make a ruling until I see the Hansard Report.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Madam Speaker, I am asking him to withdraw that because I did not say that.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Madam Speaker, on a Point of Order, I think the Honourable Attorney General has imputed that I had not opposed racism. Madam Speaker, I represent the party which has a history of fighting against racism in this country.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- You did not do it though!

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- The Point of Order is not on the content of the speech, it is on the rules and procedures of the House. Your Point of Order does not qualify under the Point of Order process.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM. - Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, the point is this, we must appraise this Budget in a holistic and fair sighted manner and these programmes. Madam Speaker, more importantly when we look at these programmes, we need to understand how it would pen out in terms of sustainability, on our overall public finances. Of course, we want TELS to be self-subsisting. We want more people to benefit.

No eligible Fijian should be left out under our current scheme. That is why we have made it more flexible. No need for guarantors, Year 12 students can now also join the scheme for eligible courses at FNU, increased allowances to ensure these tertiary students have the appropriate resources, we are giving more flexibility to change or repeat courses, Madam Speaker, but they need to pay back. They need to pay back because it brings about responsibility. And as we have said time and time again, you only start paying when you start earning and the maximum interest rate is 2 percent. Low income family students do not pay any interest rate.



Overall, any economist will tell you that the level of debt exposure will actually decrease because it is the dollar, Madam Speaker, of course, what you have to pay back will have a more buying power.

Madam Speaker, I think Honourable Radrodro mentioned that now debt collection will be done by Fiji Revenue and Customs Authority, they are going to now suddenly hound those people.

HECS, which is the equivalent of TELS in Australia, is connected by the Australian Taxation Office. It just makes sense, Madam Speaker, that when you are earning you pay PAYE, now of course the income threshold has gone to \$30,000. You have a TIN number, you have your employer and you get deducted from there. It is very simple, it makes revenue collection a lot simpler. People are held more accountable Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, the NFP has social amnesia. They are very selective in the way that they show their figures, Madam Speaker. Let me just highlight to you. I got the figures from RBF. The land leases started expiring round about 1997 and there was something like 20,000 registered cane farmers. Then by 2006, there were 16, 000 cane farmers. There is a direct correlation between the non-renewal of leases and the number of farmers.

Madam Speaker, Honourable Prem Singh says that when they come into Government, God forbid, that they will bring the Sugar Cane Growers Council back. The Sugar Cane Growers Council was still holding elections from 1997 to 2006. What did they do to stop the number of farmers leaving the cane fields? What did they do to stop the non-renewal of leases? What did they do to stop the Honourable Nawaikula and Mr. Qarikau that time? What did they do? Zero! Zero! CBUL, Madam Speaker.

The Honourable Minister of Agriculture has ensured a renewal of leases. We pay nearly \$9 million a year, to pay directly to the landowners another 4 percent on UCV. We are doing that, but the fact is, they do not want highlight those facts. No other farming sector in Fiji has those kind of elections, the *dalo* farmers do not, the *yaqona* farmers do not, and none of them do. Why is it that they are saying that if Sugar Cane Growers Council have elections, only then the sugarcane industry will thrive?

It is politics, Madam Speaker. Everyone knows that National Farmers Union is a proxy for Fiji Labour Party. Everyone knows that the Fiji Cane Growers Association is a proxy for NFP. They go around with their flags come election time, fight each other and they go and sit in the Council and then when one overseas trip comes along, they say, "Hey, he a Labour person he should not go. The NFP person should not go. Might as well all 36 of us go."

(Laughter)

That is what they did once, all 36 went overseas. Whose money?

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- The farmers!

HON. A. SAYED- KHAIYUM. – The farmer's money. This Government is paying for the running of the Council, this Government is subsidizing the cost, which is the reality.

Madam Speaker, they say \$100 per tonne, we say reduce the cost of the input. He is an economist, who claims to be an economist, knowing full well that we are getting off the EU subsidy, knowing full well that we will be influenced by world commodity prices, but still saying; "Give \$100 per tonne." When the world commodity prices falls to, say \$50 a tonne, who is going to pay the \$50?

NFP certainly does not have the money. Madam Speaker, the point is, we have met farmers, we have spoken to them and they have said to us, "We know that these people are trying to delude us." They know that Madam Speaker, I was in Wailevu, Labasa, I know the story. I know the shenanigans.

(Chorus of interjections)

Madam Speaker, with reference to the support for non-sugar sector, the Honourable Minister for Agriculture had highlighted and dissected the budget estimates, they realised that Government is actually providing more funds to the sector as discussed by the Honourable Minister.

The land lease policies introduced by FijiFirst Government has now allowed for 99 year leases for agricultural purposes. It was never done before, Madam Speaker. Crown land is now giving for agriculture purposes, 99 year leases. Only the other day, the agriculture students on scholarships and had actually done their studies, ITLTB have got them 99 year leases. Government actually paid for five years for their leases and the premiums. They can now go to the bank and actually use that as collateral - get their tractor, get their technology, Madam Speaker, and other farmers can do the same. It received huge improvement in the agriculture sector, and gets reviewed.

According to the Constitution now, landowners must be paid the market value. Now, they tie in ALTA with the 5 percent or 6 percent UCV.

Madam Speaker, as we highlighted, the crop insurance for agriculture, including non-sugar -*dalo*, *yaqona*, rice and vegetables, they do not pick up on these. I think Honourable Vadei would do this, seeing that he is from Lomaiviti, they are also parochial in their assessments.

We have zero-rated VAT on the supply of fish to PAFCO. Madam Speaker, those who supply fish to PAFCO are also eligible for 50 percent export tax deduction. We are also protecting, supporting a local dairy industry. The increase in dairy products is mainly due to the increase in import prices and not any government policy to hike internationally, they need to go and read the literature.

In France, Madam Speaker, pastry shops are closing down because of the increase in the price of butter. They do not want to tell the people that, they are obsessed with this company because they think there is something there. You have been now five years, nothing is there, nothing is there, no matter how much you do this or do that, nothing will happen, Madam Speaker, no matter how much you try and milk in.

They talk about foreign companies, they got it wrong, Honourable Radrodro, got it wrong.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- (Inaudible interjection)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Please, keep quiet! Please, keep quiet!

(Laughter)

HON. RPROF. B.C. PRASAD.- They've killed the industry.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, Honourable Radrodro said by asking the 9 million litres tax on the resource tax for water, they have said this will actually discourage local water bottlers.

Madam Speaker, if he understood what he was talking about, this is actually helping them because he would realise that the moment, none of those local bottled water companies is actually do even more

than \$3 million or \$4 million. It used to be \$5 million, we have extended it to \$9 million, so they do not actually have to a pay tax burden. They talk about Natural Waters Viti Limited. This company has a 13 year tax holiday, and declared losses in all those 13 years.

We found they do transfer pricing, Madam Speaker, they were selling to their own companies for \$4 a carton. This whole carton of water selling to their own company. We are being short-changed, and then they along and said they want to carry forward our losses. This is the company they want to sit with and say; "Let us do a deal."

Madam Speaker, we have said not all supermarkets are bandaged, in fact some of them are talking to us now, telling also what the others are doing. This is the type of consultations that are taking place, we will go after companies that are ripping off the system, and they have to pay taxes. We want to make money, Madam Speaker, but do it fairly and squarely.

Madam Speaker, again, this whole 15 items, they know, they have increased the 15 items. They are initially saying those six items to be VAT exempt. Now, they are saying 15 when we actually put out in the public space, it is not going to make a difference.

Madam Speaker, the point is, we will reduce the cost of living by removing VAT, and you will see an exponential change when now the Fiji Commerce Commission is now empowered to go to those five or six companies that are sole agents for importing a lot of the food in Fiji. And we are going to ensure that the pricing that they do is not ripping off the retailers which is then passed on to the consumers, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, given the contributions of the Opposition, this is full of half-truths. We need to tell the people of Fiji to be careful of these obfuscated issues, simply to get votes, Madam Speaker. If they are doing this in Parliament, imagine what they will do when they are outside of Parliament.

Madam Speaker, I want to say this fair and square, the policies of this Government is not being put forward by the Honourable Prime Minister because he is the *iTaukei*, he is Methodist, he went to the school called RKS and went to Marist or he comes from Tailevu; this policy is not being forward nor do I have 'R' because I am a Muslim and I come from Nadroga, I went to Marist, I have three children; the Honourable Minister for Agriculture is not doing this because he went to RKS and comes from Tailevu, Honourable Akbar just because she is from Ba and a school teacher, Honourable Koroilavesau because he is a navy man and I can go down the whole list, we are doing this, Madam Speaker, because we want to improve our country.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- We want to ensure that we empower the Fijian people, the ordinary people and release the productivity capacity. These people, Madam Speaker, unfortunately boil down. Whenever they lose the pot, they go on to ethnicity, Madam Speaker. They personalise issues. Unfortunately, the NFP does not stand up to that either. What did NFP did previously? What are they doing now? That is the question, what are they doing now?

HON. S.D. KARAVAKI.- (Inaudible interjection)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, the reality is, like the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, unfortunately she herself fell into that trap.

HON. RO T.V. KEPA.- What trap?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- The trap of you! Madam Speaker, I do not want to respond to that, I have already said it.

When the Minister of Economy says the list of those Muslim companies, these are the people. That is why I am saying the Ministry of Finance should be called Ministry of Economy. Shameful! Shameful!

Madam Speaker, the reality is this, under the Bainimarama-led Government and the FijiFirst Government every single citizen of this country has been treated equally.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Every citizen of this country's needs have been addressed. W Someone said that we cannot fulfil everyone's 100 percent requirement, but we are darn sure that we are actually working towards that. We are ensuring that the future of our people's capacity is protected.

Madam Speaker, I just wanted to highlight Mauritius. They all talked about Mauritius. Their debt to GDP ratio is 62.7 percent. Their overall debt exposure is US\$6 billion. Our debt today at GDP ratio is US\$46.2 billion: US\$2 billion. But then they say we are a failed economy, we are going to face crisis.

Mauritius, Madam Speaker, they are not saying that. PNG, Madam Speaker, 33.5 percent - \$6 billion exposure. The reality is, that debt to GDP ratio means that GDP is obviously higher. Unfortunately, this is the problem, there is no understanding of it.

The point is, we will not be distracted by cheap political shots by the Oppositions, Madam Speaker. We have the vision for this country and a very strong leadership under the Honourable Prime Minister Voreqe Bainimarama.

Madam Speaker, we have a leadership with spine. This Budget lays the platform for that vision, Madam Speaker. In contrast, the contribution by the Opposition is full of hot air, lacks substance and like them to pie in sky stuff.

Madam Speaker, the FijiFirst Government has already delivered four Budgets and this is our fifth Budget. There has been an overwhelming positive support for our Budget. Some Opposition Members have already, in private, considered that this is the mother of all Budgets. However, Madam Speaker, what we are saying is what the Honourable Prime Minister said, these Budgets are not one-off, they are building blocks, and this precisely what is culminated into, Madam Speaker. If they had studied these two years ago, they would have known this is going to happen. We talked about Civil Service Reform in two years and we said that we will do it constructively, professionally and objectively, and this is the culmination of that, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, the Fijian economy is forecasted to grow for eight consecutive years, and this Budget is expected to further boost business confidence, increase investments and provide the right impetus for higher growth, more inclusive and sustainable, more jobs for our people and our younger people and higher incomes. But the Opposition, unfortunately, is incomplete denial.

Madam Speaker, we look forward to more constructive debate on the Budget from the Shadow Minister in the Opposition bench when our Budget is next presented and, of course, they will be sitting on the other side, Madam Speaker, and we look forward to the detailed submission.

Madam Speaker, once again, I commend this Budget to Parliament. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you.

Pursuant to Standing Order 99(3), the 2017-2018 Appropriation Bill 2017, Bill No. 15 of 2017, has now been read a second time and without any question being put. The Bill and the Estimates now stand referred to the Committee of Supply.

Bill read a second time.

Committee of Supply

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Parliament will resolve into Committee of Supply to consider each Head in the Budget Estimates. This process is envisage to be completed on Thursday, and then the Committee of Supply will vote on the Schedules and Clauses of the 2017-2018 Appropriation Bill 2017.

Pursuant to the agreement reached between the Whips, we will attempt to complete debate and votes on Heads 1 to 15 before today's adjournment. For the Committee stage, I will sit at the table with the Secretary-General and Members should refer to me as Madam Chairperson. The Mace will also be placed in the bracket under the table. The Secretary-General will announce each Head separately. Members may then stand to speak on that Head, you may speak more than once on each Head. You may also move amendments to the estimates in that Head. If a Member does move an amendment, debate will then be on the Head and the amendment. At the end of the debate the amendment or amendments will be voted on first and then followed by vote on the Head.

Please be reminded that amendments in Committee of Supply are limited to those permitted in Standing Order 100(2). This is either an increase, decrease or removal, and I repeat, it will be either an increase, decrease or removal of the item or sub-head from the Head being debated.

Finally, the debate, if any, should be confined to the Head, Sub-Head or item referred to. Any debate must be relevant, concise and not repetitious. Having said that, because the Estimates run the full breadth of Government's expenditure and revenue, the debate will be far-reaching but must be relatable to the Head being debated. There are Heads 1 through 50 which we need to get through and, therefore, I will be vigilant and order Members to cease speaking, if I feel the rule of the Committee process is being breached.

Honourable Members, I ask for your co-operation.

In Committee:

Head 1 – Office of the President

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- The floor is now open for comments.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Madam Chairperson, just a clarification, I notice that the State House has been considered for upgrade and says that the allocation is within the Ministry of Economy's Construction Implementation Unit. When I looked at it, there is nothing there. I just need a clarification from the Honourable Minister?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Chairperson, it is actually in Head 50.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Yes, because it says, it is within the Ministry of Economy, that is where I think the confusion is.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Construction Implementation Unit (CIU) of the Ministry of Economy. CIU sits in the Ministry of Economy, it does not mean that it is going to be in the Ministry of Economy. Head 50 is also administered by the Ministry of Economy.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Thank you. Any other comment?

HON. RO T.V. KEPA.- Madam Chairperson, I notice that from last year to this year, there is a decrease of \$1.4 million. We noticed that the fencing really needs redoing, so why is there a decrease and what is happening to the fence?

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- We are looking at the Budget for this year.

HON. RO T.V. KEPA.- That is right, there is a decrease in that but it needs a lot of money.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- There has been a decrease in this year's budget, do you want to amend? What do you want, do you want to increase, decrease further or remove it?

HON. RO T.V. KEPA.- It should be increased.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- You want an increase?

HON. RO T.V. KEPA.- Yes, Madam Chairperson.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Just give a form for the amendment.

Any other comments?

HON. J. DULAKIVERATA.- Madam Chairperson, just a clarification; it says here, I quote: "The State House will undergo major upgrades..." We understand that the Office of the President has several residences. Is this repair for all or just one, Madam Chairperson?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- The State House, Madam Chairperson, is the actual State House itself which includes the main building. Of course, there are attachments to it, they will get renovated.

(Hon. Member interjects)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- No, no, it is mainly for the Suva one because actually the building is decaying. As you know, it was built in the 1920s, 1930s. The concrete has become porous so the water is actually sipping in. There needs to be huge refurbishment in terms of waterproofing the walls. There is water, like this Government Buildings here, you will see in some of the buildings that the paint is coming off because the water has actually gone inside the concrete.

HON. P. CHAND.- Madam Chairperson, pursuant to Standing Order 102(1), I move without notice:

That Head 1-1-1-3 (Overseas Travel) be increased by \$200,000, that is totalling \$400,000 in respect of overseas travel for the President.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- How are you picking up that figure, from thin air or what is the justification for the increase?

HON. P. CHAND.- Madam Chairperson, drawing from the 2015 Auditor-General's Report, it is most undignified that the Office of our Commander-in-Chief and President is expected to do so with so little, and the mispostings in the Auditor-General's Report validates this. So this SEG needs to be increased, from \$200,000 to \$400,000.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Would you like to fill up the amendment form?

HON. RATU K. KILIRAKI.- Madam Chairperson, I just need a clarification in regards to the fencing repairs that is ongoing at Government House. It does not seem to appear under this Head, and whether the Honourable Minister can clarify whether it is within this budget allocation?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Chairperson, it is not, that is why I wanted to comment on the Honourable Leader of the Opposition's quest to increase it. You cannot increase something that is not there. It is actually being funded by the Chinese aid. The fence, of course, is in a deplorable state, we agree. They have now revised the material that will be used. I understand, I do not know the technical term but 45 galvanised iron will stop the rot and they are in the process of doing it. If you go there now, you will see some works have already started in that respect.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Any further comments?

HON. A.T. VADEI.- Madam Chairperson, with regard to the President's House, does that include Boron House too?

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- I think the question has been answered.

HON. A.T. VADEI.- Just for clarity.

HON. MEMBER.- Boron House comes under Foreign Affairs.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- The issue has been addressed earlier.

Any other comments. Is this the only amendment?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Just a clarification on Head 1-1-1-3 (Travel and Communications), can you just give a clarification on the allocation of \$411,900 in the 2017-2018 Budget but its comparison to previous years, it was given \$1 million in the 2015-2016 Budget? Can we get some clarification on that?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Honourable Member, what was the clarification about?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- On the allocation as compared to previous years?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- In fact, it has increased.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- It has decreased.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- It has increased by 32.1 percent, we have given an additional \$100,000 for Travel.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Compared to 2015-2016 Budget, it was \$1 million.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Yes, and now it has been rationalised. In the 2016-2017 Budget, the allocation was \$311,900 and this year, we have given \$411,900, which is \$100,000, an increase by 32.1 percent. That is precisely the reason for the Travel. Of course, we have had discussions with his Official Secretary and the staff, and they believe that the \$100,000 for travel is sufficient.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Honourable Members, please, understand that all these figures have been made based on the recommendation of the staff and not just by the Ministry of Economy.

HON. RATU N.T. LALABALAVU.- Madam Chairperson, I just seek some guidance. You are allowing Honourable Members to seek clarification or ....

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- What we are doing is, we are only talking about the SEG on whether to increase, decrease or remove and therefore they are requesting this information because they want an increase according to them or decrease. That is why I am saying all these figures have been decided in consultation with the staff at the President's Office and these are the figures that they have recommended. So, we are looking at whether you want an increase, decrease or to remove that budget and this is what we are doing now.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Chairperson, if I can also, the Honourable Prasad had asked some questions in the capital expenditure for State House, we are giving \$4.3 million which is to commence the upgrading work to the State House in 2017-2018 which includes obviously the preservation of the residence which was built in 1928. Upgrade to the State House also includes allocation to complete other ongoing capital projects to install a new fire alarm system, construct a new outdoor area and upgrade the coronation ground used for official ceremonies; it is in Head 50.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Any other comments? Honourable Ro Kiliraki.

HON. RATU K. KILIRAKI.- Just a clarification on SEG 4 - Spare Parts and Maintenance, whether the vehicles are on lease or owned by the President's Office?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- As far as the expenditure is concerned, Madam Chairperson, on SEG 4 there has been no increase in the allocation compared to 2016-2017. There are some vehicles that are leased, there are some older ones that may not be leased but therefore there is no need to increase the allocation for spare parts and maintenance; it is the same allocation overall.

HON. RATU K. KILIRAKI.- Just a clarification, Madam Chairperson, in terms of the amount there in regards to the leased vehicles and those which are not leased or owned. There is no increase or decrease, given the one year from now, can he clarify in terms of the leased vehicles so that I can understand whether to amend.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Chairperson, I do not have that number of vehicles in the overall pool of His Excellency's vehicle requirements. I can give it to the Honourable Member later on but generally as a rule, we buy or have an outright purchase of His Excellency's vehicle and also the Honourable Prime Minister's vehicle. But the other vehicles like for example his backup, security body guards, et cetera, they may be using leased vehicles. The fact of the matter is that at the end of the day we do not need to have an increase in the allocation for this.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- There being no further comments, any more amendments? I am sure there were more than one amendment. Only one amendment? There is one amendment, it is from the Honourable Parmod Chand.



Head 1 be increased by \$200,000 in Programme 1, Activity 1, SEG 3 with respect to Overseas Travel. Are we all clear? He wants an increase in the Overseas Travel allocation to be increased by \$200,000.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Chairperson, we object to this. As we have said that we have already increased this allocation by \$100,000. We have had discussions with the Official Secretary of His Excellency, there is no need to increase this and we believe this is sufficient.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Thank you. We will vote on this amendment.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- I think the procedure is, he makes the amendment by motion and then we talk about it and then you can oppose it, then we vote on it.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- He has moved his motion?

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Yes, he wants to increase and he can only do that by motion.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Yes. This is the one that we are reading now, that is his motion for this amendment.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Thank you.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- So, do we have a seconder?

HON. P. CHAND.- Simply speaking, Madam Chairperson, what I am saying that the President, when we look at the President of a nation we need to give him some dignity. What I am saying, I have just heard from the Attorney- General that \$100,000 was increased. I am saying increase it from \$200,000 to \$400,000. If it was \$100,000, it is \$200,000 now but to me looking at such a person of such a magnitude, the President of the nation, I believe that it is important that we give him some dignity by increasing this.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- I think if we were to continue with this kind of debate we will take the whole night. I mean that should come from the President himself, he may not agree with you.

HON. P. CHAND.- Madam Chairperson, if he does not agree then we should not have this kind of system in the House here. It is futile.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- We are merely approving what his office has recommended which is enough for the President's travel and this is the figure that has been mentioned. So, you are moving an amendment to that and this is what we are discussing now. Firstly, we must have a seconder to your motion. So, do we have a seconder?

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- I second the motion, Madam Chairperson.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- I second the motion.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- No, it has been seconded already, thank you. So, open for a debate if any comments. Are there any comments on this?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Chairperson, the dignity of His Excellency's Office and His Excellency will not be enhanced by giving him \$200,000 increase in his travel. It is a preposterous logic.

Reality, Madam Chairperson, is that the dignity in the high office of His Excellency's the President is not dependent on the amount of allocation. The allocation should be based on whether he requires it or not and the reality, Madam Chairperson, is that we had consulted with the Official Secretary and we had two rounds of consultations. Just for future references for all the other Heads.

The Permanent Secretary and her team met up with all the other Permanent Secretaries, the heads of different agencies then we had another round of consultations, then we had the third round of consultations, Madam Chairperson, with the respective Ministers came along then we were there together with the PS and had that final decision made. All the Ministers will attest to that. The same thing we did with His Excellency's Office. We increased it by \$100,000 which you have done, and this is why we believe it is a good projection of figures.

HON. RO T.V. KEPA.- Madam Chairperson, I second the motion in the increase in the travel allowance because previously they had vired from maintenance and operations to fund the travel of the President.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Thank you. The motion has been seconded already. We are now on the debate.

HON. RO T.V. KEPA.- That is why the buildings are run down.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- We are not talking about the buildings, we are talking about travel.

HON. RO T.V. KEPA.- Because they are viring from buildings and maintenance to vire for the travel.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Honourable Members, please, as the Honourable Minister has already explained, all these figures have been agreed to by the staff of the Office of the President and these are the figures that they think is sufficient, based on their own experiences. So please let us not spend too much time in trying to change what they have already recommended.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- I support.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Yes, you support.

HON. N NAWAIKULA.- I believe that the whole purpose of this, Madam Chairperson is for transparency because otherwise we would not be here. Now he has moved a motion that it be increased by \$200,000. I feel sincerely that a suitable, the Honourable Prime Minister - \$1.5 million; that is too much. This, he is only asking for \$200,000 to be added to that so that the amount now will be \$400,000. That is appropriate for that kind of office. Never mind what they recommend, that is for them but for this House and for the accountability so that we can speak out to the public, I support it.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Thank you. Honourable Vadei, would you like to speak?

HON. A.T. VADEI.- Yes, Madam Chairperson, the reason why we have this process is that we do not have the benefit of that consultation by the Government. So, that is why we need this clarity and briefing before we pass this Budget otherwise we will not support.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- I think if you were to have a brief on this Budget, you will have a brief with the staff over there and they will tell you exactly the same figures that they have recommended. Any more comments on this?

There being no comments, we will vote on this amendment. Does anyone oppose?

(Chorus of Ayes and Noes)

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- There being Opposition, we will open the vote.

Votes cast:

Ayes	-	15
Noes	-	30

There being 15 Ayes and 30 Noes, the motion to amend has been defeated.

Amendment Motion lost.

HON. RATU K. KILIRAKI.- Madam Chairperson, in Head 1, SEG 1 – Personal Emoluments. From last year, there were 22 staff and 15 Unestablished staff. Does that mean there is an increase or decrease of staff? Personal Emoluments still in Head 1 just before we go to Head 2, Madam Chairperson. SEG 1 the Personal Emoluments of \$635,061 whether there is any change in the number of officers in the President's Office?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Chairperson, the Honourable Member should know this from last year that we no longer put staff members. The increase that is there is because of the fact of the Job Evaluation Exercise. It has increased by \$94,900, the variance is 14.6 percent; that is the increase.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- We will now vote on the Head. The Parliament will now vote on Head No. 1.

Question put.

The Question is:

That the amount in Head 1 - Office of the President, be approved.

Does any Member oppose the motion?

(Chorus of Ayes and Noes)

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- There being opposition, Parliament will now vote:

Votes cast:

Ayes	-	31
Noes	-	14
Not Voted	-	5

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- There being 31 Ayes, 14 Noes and 5 Not Voted, the motion is agreed to.

Head 1 – Office of the President, agreed to.

Head 2 - Office of the Prime Minister

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- The floor is now open for comments. Honourable Prem Singh?

HON. P. SINGH.- Madam Chairperson, Head 2-1-1, can I please get some clarification for SEG 3? The Honourable Prime Minister's Travel allocation is noted and presumably, this is related to COP 23 Presidency. The Presidency kicks in after this year's UNFCC COP, therefore, we were wondering if it will be prudent to factor in specific public relations and consultants allocation for COP 23 and we do not seem to see it in the Ministry of Economy's Activity 10 or Foreign Affairs Activity 1 or Activity 2 unless of course the new COP 23 Trust Fund can handle this.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- You need a clarification on that?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Yes.

HON. P. SINGH.- So it is within....

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Thank you. Any other comments?

HON. MEMBERS.- No!

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Honourable Ratu Kiliraki?

HON. RATU K. KILIRAKI.- Activity 1, SEG 6 - Fiji Mahogany Trust. The \$250,000 has been there for a number of years whether their staff are also included in the pay increase so that I can make some amendments to this allocation.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- You have clarification on that?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Chairperson, the Honourable Member knows this that the Trust is actually, if there is any staff engaged by the Trust is not in the purview of civil servants; it is simple.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Honourable Member, have you heard it?

HON. RATU K. KILIRAKI.- Yes, Madam Chairperson.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Thank you. Any other comments? There being no other comments....

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Madam Chairperson, I wish to move a motion. In relation to Activity 1- SEG 3 to reduce the overseas travel by \$1 million so that the balance should be \$500,000.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- You have justification for what you have just said?

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- It is my motion, I move that.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Do we have a seconder to such a motion?

(Laughter)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Secunder, is right here.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- You have seconder to such a motion. Looks like there is no seconder. Thank you.

Honourable Leawere, did you second the motion?

HON. M.R. LEAWERE.- Yes, Madam Chairperson.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Please stand up when you second it so I can know.

HON. M.R. LEAWERE.- Sorry, Madam.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Thank you. Do we have any comments? Yes, Honourable Aseri Radrodro?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Madam Chairperson, on Programme 1, Activity 1 ...

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- No, no we are still talking on that motion. The motion has been tabled and has been seconded, it is now open for comments, if any.

Does anyone want to speak on this decrease of the Honourable Prime Minister's travel by \$1 million?

HON. M.R. LEAWERE.- Madam Chairperson, just a comment on that motion. The allocation is quite exorbitant and totally unjustified because as a Chair of COP 23 he should have hosted a number of those meetings in Fiji so that we can project Fiji to those coming from overseas.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- I wonder if you know that when we have these meetings in Fiji we will be catering for thousands of people; I do not know whether we have the facilities to do this. I am just saying that because I have been to so many of these UN Conferences where they have got thousands of people that we are not able to cater for if we have it in Fiji and this is why we have moved it to Germany. At first we had wanted it here but unable to. Are there any other comments?

The motion is now on the House that Head 2 be decreased by \$1 million in a Programme 1, Activity 1, SEG 1 with respect to overseas travel. Does anyone oppose the motion?

(Chorus of Ayes and Noes)

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- There being opposition, Parliament will vote on the motion.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Can I speak first?

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- No, when I speak on the motion.

(Chorus of interjections)

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- I had already invited comments on this.

(Chorus of interjections)

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Honourable Nawaikula, I had already invited any further comments on this before we vote and there were none.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- (Inaudible)

(Laughter)

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Comments is debate, we are within the debate.

(Chorus of interjections)

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- I will give you the floor.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Thank you. Madam Chairperson, the allocation there is \$1.5 million for overseas travel of our Honourable Prime Minister. The motion that I am putting before this House is for it to be reduced by \$1 million so that the allocation for our Honourable Prime Minister for overseas travel is only \$500,000.

The reason for that is because our Prime Minister is not the Prime Minister for the world, he is a Prime Minister for Fiji. He should concentrate on what needs to be done here. By giving this allocation, we are allowing him, encouraging him to move away and in the last year, I believe he would have spent half the time that he should be staying here, going overseas, here and there and there. Even for COP 23, COP 23 that is for the world.

Now, if you have a concern on our environment, please, Madam Chair, the Honourable Prime Minister should be here and look after the environment first here in Fiji including the ocean. We do not even have a policy on the ocean, so we need our Prime Minister to be a Prime Minister of Fiji; \$1.5 million is too much! And in the last years, he has been a tourist Prime Minister, going from this country to that country and not concentrating on Fiji and that is the reason why we should reduce the allocation to let him sit down and do his job.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Thank you. Any other comments?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Chairperson, as I said in my closing for the actual Appropriation Bill, the level of contribution of the Opposition is actually quite pathetic.

Madam Chairperson...

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- (Inaudible)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- I did not interrupt when you were talking, now let me talk.

Madam Chairperson, he says climate change is for the world. Are we not part of the world? We are part of the world. He thinks climate change actually occurs outside of Fiji. They talk about Oceans Conference, they talk about oceans, do they not know that the pollution in the oceans comes from other countries comes to Fiji? Do they not know that the radiation that the French did their testing in Tahiti comes also to the Pacific?

Madam Chairperson, the reality is this that the Honourable Prime Minister has been very heavily engaged by the international communities. It is a huge accolade for Fiji. Huge windfall for Fiji, it brings enormous attention to Fiji and indeed, Madam Chairperson, enormous financial benefit for Fiji.

Madam Chairperson, they talk about increasing our exports, this is the level of engagement that takes place. We live in a globalised community. Madam Chairperson, on the other flip-side, no Prime Minister like this current Prime Minister has ever traversed as much as he has in Fiji. He reaches in the

corners of Kadavu and Vanua Levu and various other places that no other Prime Minister has gone. Gone on horseback, gone in boats, everywhere except helicopters he does not like it.

HON. S.D. KARAVAKI.- It is a joy ride.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Chairperson, he is saying a horse is a joy ride. What? Pathetic! Madam Chairperson.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBER.- (Inaudible)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- I challenge the Opposition, Madam Chairperson, to demonstrate how many other Prime Ministers.

Honourable Leader of the Opposition that is the quality of your frontline. That is the quality of your frontline. Madam Chairperson, no other Prime Minister has travelled as much as this Honourable Prime Minister to the far corners of Fiji, who has had so much engaged with the ordinary Fijians no other Prime Minister has. He is the most approachable Prime Minister, Madam Chairperson, they don't like that. What they are trying to do, Madam Chairperson, is to play to the cameras and say, "don't allocate \$1.5 million."

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- It is too much.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- He is a Prime Minister, Madam Chairperson, who can perform his duties internationally and domestically and just as well.

HON. GOVT. MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- I am, Chair not the Speaker, I can also have an input to this. It is the devastation of *TC Winston* to Fiji and that is the effect of climate change that has been generated by the countries outside of Fiji and this is why we are feeling the brunt of climate change and this is why our Prime Minister is taking our small island countries and our experiences of climate change to these countries. Thank you.

HON. A.T. VADEI.- Thank you, Madam Chairperson, in support of the motion, I believe to reduce, that is taxpayer's money, taxpayers are still the victim of *TC Winston* and we need to rectify our problem here before he goes out and tells the world the way Fiji should be. Thank you.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Honourable Minister.

HON. J. USAMATE.- I just think on this particular issue, the Opposition is in a bit of a time-war. What does leadership mean? The old concept of leadership is that you have to be there all the time doing everything yourself and making every decision. Those are the old ways of leadership. In current leadership, a good leader selects good leaders, good Ministers to make sure they can do the work whether he is here or not. That is the concept of leadership, your notion of leadership is that the boss has to be doing everything all the time. We have walked out of that notion of leadership. If the Prime Minister is here or is not here, work gets done because this Government is for execution and delivering things to the people of this country.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Honourable Kilikari.

HON. RATU K. KILIRAKI.- Madam Chairperson, I think the motion is fair enough because the perception that the Honourable Prime Minister makes so many trips. This is from the people and whenever there is a need, his visibility is very important especially in Fiji. Post-*TC Winston*, that is the

motion. The motion to amend is from the people because we understand that the Prime Minister is a Prime Minister of Fiji and given also that COP 23 and the funds that have been donated by other countries and we have a trust for that. The layman's understanding is that, that should be self-financed in terms of the expenses that the Prime Minister may incur. So I think the motion is fair enough and we think that it should be decreased.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Thank you. So, we have heard the motion. Thank you for the clarification on the motion. Parliament will now vote on this motion.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Madam Chairperson, we view this very seriously because a lot of the programmes even in this Parliament have had to be cancelled because of the Prime Minister's absence from this country. I understand going forward after the sitting in September, we will not meet until February and I believe a proposal has been put to the Business Committee for a Parliamentary meeting in December and January but it has been cancelled because his away. So, exactly what my colleague is saying, he needs to spend more time here. Because of this, so many of the Bills are going through the 51 pathway and this is a tragedy because as he is never here. There should be a legislative agenda by the ruling party for its legislative committee to look at the Bills, to come through the proper way for Parliamentary debate. The way it is being done now, it is all 51 and it is because there is disarray on that side because No. 1 is always away. Let us put that into perspective, having some more time here so we get more Parliamentary sitting, more debates for laws, et cetera.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Anymore comments? Honourable Radrodro

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Madam Chairperson, speaking in support of the motion to reduce the allocation because I note that this is the same allocation that was provided for last year. So if he had made those visits last year, this year it should be reduced, not visit the same place again. Also, Madam Chairperson, is this visitation part of COP 23 or not? If it is, then why is it provided for in the PM's overseas travel?

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Thank you. Any other comments?

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Just quickly, Madam Chairperson, I think they lose track of what the Honourable Prime Minister is and what he does. I think what needs to be put in perspective if this our Honourable Prime Minister visits New York, then at the same time he visits Nabouwalu. If he visits Bonn, at the same time he visits Burelevu.

Madam Chairperson, this Honourable Prime Minister travels not just worldwide but throughout the country. I have had the pleasure of accompanying him throughout Vanua Levu and Viti Levu. This justification is proper. It should remain at that amount of money and they forget that he is the Honourable Prime Minister and also the Minister for Foreign Affairs. At any given time, if he is required in Foreign Affairs and also on his trip when he goes overseas, he takes care of trade issues, foreign affairs issues, sugar issues and all that. So I think it is totally justified and I disagree with the motion put forward.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Thank you. Parliament will now vote on the motion that Head 2 be decreased by \$1 million in Programme 1, Activity 1, SEG 2 with respect to overseas travel.

Do we have any opposition?

(Chorus of Ayes and Noes)

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- There being opposition, Parliament will now vote on the motion.

Votes cast:



Ayes	-	13
Noes	-	31

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- There being 13 Ayes and 31 Noes, the proposed motion for the amendment is defeated.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Programme 1, Activity 1, SEG 10, I note \$200,000 is no longer allocated in 2017-2018.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- There is no SEG 10.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- There is no allocation as compared to last year. Can we just get clarification, where is this allocation gone to?

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- You mean Activity 2?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Activity 1.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- There is no SEG 10 in Activity 1.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- In the book. There is nothing there because it is no longer allocated.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Chairperson, the 200,000 was for Friends in the fund for the education for needy children. The \$200,000 has actually moved now directly to Ministry of Education.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Let us have a look at Head 2, Programme 2 – Office of the Prime Minister.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Madam Chairperson, Programme 2, Activity 1, SEG 7 – the former Prime Ministers' benefits. We have seen an increase from \$64,000 to \$100,000. Can we have some background to that on the increase?

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- This is the former Prime Ministers benefit, there have been an increase. Programme 2, Activity 1, SEG 7.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Yes, what about it?

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- There has been an increase from last year.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Chairperson, they have also got an increase, so Qarase, Chaudhry and Rabuka are getting an increase because all pensioners or Government pensioners have received an increase.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Is Ratu Momoedonu also included in this?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- He would be if he is getting any benefit from that. Any of the former Prime Ministers that were entitled are getting paid from here too. You also see the pension, in the pension, there is also an increase in Head 50.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Thank you. We move on to Programme 3.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Programme 1, Activity 2 – Public Outreach and Consultation. What is this? We have not touched this, we jumped from 1 to 3.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Actually Honourable Radrodro we did move on because I had asked for any further comments on this, this is why. Anyway we are still accommodating your question.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Public outreach and consultation of \$100,000 has been allocated which needs some clarification.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Chairperson, we are maintaining it at the same level. As you know, we had \$100,000 this year 2016-2017 and 2017-2018, it is also getting a \$100,000. There are a lot of public consultations that the Honourable Prime Minister's office has. As you know, they are also responsible for Kioa Island, Rabi and Rotuma. They do go out and have public consultations in various other projects too, that is to cater for that.

Madam Chairperson, I just want to correct Honourable Gavoka had asked about the former Prime Ministers benefits. You will see that the 2016-2017 is \$100,000 and 2017-2018 is also \$100,000, so the pension increase is actually in Head 50. There are certain benefits that the former Prime Ministers get that is paid through the Cabinet Office, this Programme 2, Activity 1 is responsible for that.

The actual pension comes through Head 50 which we would go to later on and you will see the increase of 15 percent in that. The figure that you were quoting was the 2015-2016 and 2016-2017, that is the difference, but we are now in 2016-2017 year and going into 2017-2018.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- We are now moving forward. We are still on Head 2, Programme 2, Activity 1. Any further comments? No amendments?

Thank you. Let us have a look at Programme 3, Activity 1.

HON. M.R. LEAWERE.- Programme 3, Activity 1 - SEG 9 - Can we have some clarification on Biometrics Verification System and e-Passport Issuance, it is under R?

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Can we have any clarification on that?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Chairperson, this is essentially because the Department of Immigration wants to upgrade its security features, so this \$300,000 is for the engagement for the feasibility assessment detail of a programme for the biometric system that they want to introduce. For example, in some countries now, for example, when you come through you put your fingerprint and you go through. Also for us, we want to be able to increase the level of security on our passports, so that is for the feasibility assessment of that, to be able to then introduce it in the 2018-2019, to implement the project 2018-2019 but for 2017-2018, we are going to carrying out the feasibility assessment of that and that is what the \$300,000 is for.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Any further comments? Programme 3, Activity 1, any comments?

HON. RO T.V. KEPA.- On Programme 3, Activity 1 – Personal Emoluments. There is an increase there, what is the increase for? Is it for the civil servants, are they on contract?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Chairperson, again SEG 1 is always for staff employed by Government for the various respective Government department. In this case, obviously it captures the increase in salaries also that is required and, of course, there may be some additional staff that maybe required to be hired as you know that we now are issuing passports in Vanua Levu and also Nadi now. People do not have to come to Suva to get a passport.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Leader of Opposition; has that been clarified?

HON. RO T.V. KEPA.- Madam Chairperson, there is a staff on contract - that is my question.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Honourable Leader of Opposition he had answered, it included staff on contract.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Chairperson, there would be some staff who maybe on contract, I would not know whether there is a Civil Service Reform in that particular department, how many of them are going on contract or not, but that is the total bill to pay for staffing requirements for the department. SEG 1, of course, is \$3.6 million and SEG 2 is \$261,000.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Any further comments on Programme 3, Activity 1? Honourable Aseri Radrodro?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Madam Chairperson, I note that there was percentage increase in SEG 5 of Programme 3, Activity 1 - Passports of \$625,000. Can we have some clarification on the intended number of passports before we can move a motion whether to increase or decrease this? Passport of \$625,000 - SEG 5.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- I apologise, what is the question?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Can we get some clarification on this amount of \$625,000?

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Is it too much or too little?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Yes, that is what we want to find out how many passports before we can move on, whether to request ....

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Depending on the application.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, SEG 5 essentially, if you see the \$625,000, it is obviously to procure for the passports and the reason why we got that amount, of course, is from an assessment done by the respective Department.

As I had said earlier on, passports are now also being issued through Labasa and also through Nadi, so Fijians do not actually have to travel to Suva. The Department has done their assessment and they believe that is how much is required for the procurement of these passports.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Any further comments? Honourable Dulakiverata?

HON. J. DULAKIVERATA.- Thank you, Madam Chairperson, Programme 1, Activity 1 SEG 7.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Programme 3, Activity 1 we are in now.

HON. J. DULAKIVERATA.- SEG 3.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Programme 3, Activity 1.

(Laughter)

HON. J. DULAKIVERATA.- I apologise, I am ahead.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Reverse gear, please.

Any other comments? Honourable Radrodro?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- (inaudible) ... IBMS, there is Annual Maintenance Fee of \$169,072 and in SEG 7, there is also IBMS Project Monitoring of Staff - \$49,061.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Do you want clarification?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Yes, what is the logic behind those two allocations?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- SEG 5, the IBMS, that is the actual Annual Maintenance Fees. As you know that we have an AMC for most of the software, so that is the annual fee for the Integrated Border Management System and the Project Monitoring Staff for that actual system itself. So it is on a project basis and that is the staffing requirements for that particular system.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Any further comments?

There being no motion for amendment, Parliament will vote on Head 2.

Question put.

The Question is:

That the amount in Head 2 - Office of the Prime Minister, be approved.

Does any Member oppose the motion?

(Chorus of Ayes and Noes)

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- There being opposition, Parliament will vote on the motion.

Votes cast:

Ayes	-	30
Noes	-	13
Abstention	-	1
Not voted	-	6

There being 30 Ayes, 13 Noes, 1 Abstention and 6 Not voted, the motion is agreed to.

Head 2 - Office of the Prime Minister agreed to.

Head 3 – Office of the Attorney-General

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- We will move on to Head No. 3. The floor is open for any comments.

HON. P. SINGH.- Madam Chairperson, Head No. 3, Programme 1, Activity 1, SEG 7, there is an allocation of \$7.215 million and the bulk of it is allocated to Digital Government Transformation \$6,000,000. Can I seek clarification on the status of this transformation?

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Honourable Attorney-General.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. As I had highlighted in the Budget Address, we are working with the Singaporean Government in respect of providing a number of platforms in terms of increasing digital accessibility for ordinary Fijians. We are hoping for the next nine months or so, at least five digital platforms will be launched from mobile phones in terms of accessing Government facilities and information. For example, we had the Singaporean Development Corporation people who had met with all the Honourable Ministers last week in terms of improving services and also in terms of coordination of data collation. The Singaporeans, as you know, are very good, they have a track record in this respect.

We are also going to coordinate with FRCA and FNPF in merging that information. This is essentially to kick start the building and capability to create sustainable digital Government adoption. The transformation process will take four years to complete, but we are hoping that it will actually be done sooner rather than later, opening further opportunities to initiate the establishment of common data and service integration, especially in the ease of doing business. Thank you.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Any further comments? Honourable Prem Singh.

HON. P. SINGH.- Thank you, Madam Chairperson. Just on the same SEG 7, can I please get some clarification on this. I am just wondering whether there is new legislation being factored into the allocation of laws for Legal Draft Legislation, I believe, is already there and also the Protection of Traditional Knowledge and Measures to ensure that the protection of Fiji's genetic resources is in the best interests of the landowners. There is also a draft legislation as part of the Law Reform Commission.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Chairperson, of course, there is a quite few projects that have been done, working with the various UN agencies regarding TRIPS also, so a lot of these matters are on foot.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Any other comments on Programme 1, Activity 1?

HON. S.D. KARAVAKI.- Madam Chairperson, can I just refer to Programme 1, Activity 1, SEG 5 states that there are 2 allocation where in the first line of SEG 5, there is Legal Expense and Fees for \$150,000 and in the last line of SEG 5 just above SEG 6 it is a Legal Experts Expenses also for \$150,000. May I have an explanation on that; are they the same activities or different I understand that the first line is expense only but there is no expert but below there is a word expert appeared, can I have the explanation on that, Madam Chairperson, please?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- One, of course, is for the hiring of lawyers to fight cases, the other one is to be able to get lawyers who may help, for example, in drafting, so that is how we distinguish that. One is for experts who come in, for example, the Honourable Minister for Agriculture or someone from the ministries may require some expert drafting and when the Attorney-General's Office does need to hire them, then they actually use it from the second one. Madam Chairperson, should we need to hire lawyers for particular case, that is when we use the first one, it has decreased over the years. The \$150,000 used to be a lot higher, but now it is \$150,000 because we hardly outsource anything.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Thank you. Honourable Dulakiverata?

HON. J. DULAKIVERATA.- Thank you, Madam Chairperson, on SEG 7 - Review of Land Lease Arrangement, I need some clarification on that \$200,000?

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Can we have the clarification?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, this allocation was also previously made, we had number of issues that are brought to our attention where it required some legal expertise and input where people have, for example, some landowners have problems. There were claims that iTLTB had gone ahead and issued development leases when iTLTB should not have done it. We had then also issues where, for example, some tenants who for example were given family proposals to lease land, but then iTLTB had gone ahead and given to it to someone else or in the process of doing that, similarly we had complaints in legal matters pertaining to crown leases, where there is duplication in terms of issuing development leases. So, that is there essentially to ensure that the type of consultations that take place and expenses related to those consultations, expenses related to providing legal advisors carried for.

HON. J. DULAKIVERATA.- Just further clarification, Madam Chairperson. Why are not these people referred to the Solicitor General's Office?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- There has been, Madam Chairperson, because they try and seek an independent party to give them some legal advice and that is what we have done. A lot of these people are low income people, they do not have any other form. Legal Aid does not really get into providing advice but as you know that in the Budget announcement, we said that Legal Aid now deal with low income families, who get eviction notices and where there is also a legal process in place they can deal with that through the court system. This is more to do with low- income people who for example may have been, you have some disputes regarding or some legal disputes but administrative disputes. So, that is how we actually provide assistance, this has been given last year too.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Thank you. Any further comments?

HON. P. CHAND.- Madam Chairperson, Head 3, Programme 2, Activity 1 - Department of Civil Aviation.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- We are looking at Head 3(1)(1) we are still working on before we move on. There being no other comments. So, we will go on to Programme 2, Activity 1. Honourable Bilitavu?

HON. M. BULITAVU.- Programme 2, Activity 1, SEG 6. Just a clarification on the Freedom of Information for \$100,000.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Madam Chairperson. You know that we have a Bill before Parliament, before the Committee where we have this Freedom of Information Bills so should that Bill get approved by Parliament then obviously there is expenses related to the implementation of that particular law and that is what that is there for.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Thank you. We will now move on to Honourable Parmod Chand.

HON. P. CHAND.- Thank you Madam Chairperson.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Head 3, Programme 2, Activity 1.

HON. P. CHAND.- Head 3-2-1 Department of Civil Aviation. I see here that in last year's Budget Estimates, we have 200,000 on Requisition, development of new airport and it is relabelled under

'R' so I would really like to know the intend of government whether they want to do something here or not and I just want to seek clarification about this.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Programme 2, Activity 1, SEG 8.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Chairperson, I wish the Honourable Member would actually think before he actually opens his mouth because the fact is this, we did make an allocation this year and the fact is yes, there are people who actually went down to Vanua Levu. So, when they go down to Vanua Levu and they do some exploratory visits, there are expenses incurred for that and that is where the expenses comes out from.

So, for example they went down to Seaqaqa, they saw a recommended site, we have to take people from AFL, we had to take people from the Ministry of Economy, we had to take people from the Ministry of Civil Aviation, we had to take people, for example from Lands Department or iTaukei Land Trust Board.

We have to see, depending on where the land is, so there are expenses related to that. They are of course preparatory works, we need to know whether the land is available or not, whether the land is suitable or not, whether there is enough land or not because obviously we are not going to put a runaway that is going to cater for 8330 immediately, we do it for ATR 72.

Now, one of the outcomes of the visit for which money was allocated was that land proposed in Seaqaqa primarily was not suitable because it does not have enough flat land for expansion. So, there would be some work related for example there may need to be, there are some geo text that may need to be done, see whether that land is too boggy or clay or whatever it is, so all of that sort of expertise and that money actually comes from there, that is what it is for. So, work obviously is continuing and there is an actual requirement to meet those expenses.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Thank you. Any further comments on Programme 2, Activity 1? There being no further comments. We will now vote on the Head. Parliament will now vote on Head 3.

Question put.

Does any Member oppose the motion?

(Chorus of ayes and noes)

There being Opposition, Parliament will vote on the motion.

Votes cast:

Ayes	-	34
Noes	-	9
Not voted	-	7

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- There being 34 Ayes, 9 Noes, 7 Not Voted, the Motion is agreed to.

Head 3 - Office of the Attorney-General agreed to.

Head 4 – Ministry of Economy

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- We will move on to Head No. 4 - Ministry of Economy. The floor is now open for any comments. Let us have a look at Programme 1, Activity 1 any comments?

HON. M.R. LEAWERE.- Madam Chairperson, what is Lands Sales Act - Programme 1, Activity 1, SEG 7?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Chairperson, this of course relates to Land Sales Act. There is a right of appeal for people who want to, for example get a longer-term to build their homes, as you know if you are a foreigner. If you now buy a land for residential purposes, we have to build within two years and some foreigners who may actually have a genuine reason where they may not be able to meet the two year requirement. So, there is a committee which consists of various Permanent Secretaries so when they meet, it is their expenses.

So, we have for example recently they had a number of applicants who wanted an extension of time, they needed to talk to them on the phone or they want to do a *skype* because they are living overseas but they own land in Fiji. So, that is to meet the expenses, this \$25,000.

HON. M.R. LEAWERE.- That means administration?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Administration, Madam Chairperson.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Any further comments? Programme 1, Activity 1. No further comments, move on to Programme 1, Activity 2. Do you have any comments? Honourable Ratu Suliano Matanitobua?

HON. RATU S. MATANITOBUA.- SEG 4, Programme 1, Activity 1.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Programme 1, Activity 2.

HON. RATU S. MATANITOBUA.- Can the Honourable Minister briefly explain they have \$383,000 - Power Supply.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- We have moved on to Activity 2. Alright we will accommodate your question on Activity 1. What is your question again?

HON. RATU S. MATANITOBUA.- On Activity 1, SEG 4, Madam Chairperson on power supply of \$383,000.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Thank you, Honourable Members this would be the last time we will accommodate any question then you have to move back to when we have passed through it. So, please let this be the last one. The Honourable Minister for Economy.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Chairperson, I understand the question is; why there is \$383,000? It has to pay for the expenses of all the Ministry of Economy offices as you know the Fiji Procurement Office, Government Supplies and all of that is in Walu Bay has to pay for its expenses, for electricity costs.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Thank you. Head 4-1-2, do you have any comments? Honourable Leader of Opposition?

HON. RO T.V. KEPA.- A question to the Honourable Minister for Economy on the CIU, where is the funding for that?



MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Which SEG are you referring to?

HON. RO T.V. KEPA.- I am looking for that SEG and I do not see it here, but the explanation is on the previous page.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Chairperson, it is actually in Head 50.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Thank you, any further comments. Honourable Vadei? Please refer to a SEG.

HON. A. VADEI.- Madam Chairperson, under this programme, SEG 6 whether that SEG has factored the Correction and the Police, that amount, just a clarification on that.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Thank you, clarification please.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- No, this is the Fiji Revenue and Customs services.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Grant to Fiji Servicemen's After Care Fund.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- My apologies, Madam Chairperson, I thought we were on Programme 1-1. Yes, it includes the entire Fijian Police Force, everyone.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Honourable Radrodro?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Madam Chairperson, on this Programme, SEG 5, I notice a huge increase in terms of allocation from \$28 million to \$1.4 million which includes Annual Maintenance Fees of \$1.2 million. Can we just get a clarification on this, and the FMIS Costs of an additional \$200,000?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Chairperson, this is essentially the FMIS annual maintenance fee is now being put in that SEG essentially to be put correctly here for the payments of the FMIS agreement that was signed some time back for the accounting services.

Generally, it used to be put in other areas but now, we have put it under the accounting services and that is why the \$1.2 million. There was an agreement negotiated back prior 2006 sometime when the FMIS system was brought into Fiji and assigned a name, Annual Maintenance Contract.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- And the FMIS Costs?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- \$1.2 million annual maintenance fees.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- The FMIS cost of \$200,000?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- This is budgetary allocation utilised for the payment of the consultant because sometimes, you need to do tweaking so, we need to bring in a consultant for that from Australia. That is where the system was bought from.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- There are no further comments, we move on to Program 1-3. Are there any comments?

HON. MEMBERS.- No.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- There being no comments, we move to the next one - Program 1-4.

HON. MEMBERS.- No.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- No comments. Program 1-5?

HON. MEMBERS.- No.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Head-4-1-6, Honourable Prem Singh?

HON. P. SINGH.- Under this Programme, SEG 7, there is an allocation for Economic Intelligence Unit (\$500,000). If we can probably get some clarification on its function and how it will add value to our taxpayers and our economy?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Chairperson, this is explained in the Budget Address. As we have stated, Madam Chairperson, if we look at most countries, the Ministry responsible for Economy and Finance actually has a unit that specifically is dedicated to policy issues and I also mentioned like in Fiji back in 2006, the World Bank did an assessment and said that one-third of the value, but then the GDP was ....

Let me give you an example, if we decide that a lot of the announcements that we made this year, we actually had planned it about two years ago. So we had targeted and said in two years' time, we need to reduce the duty in this particular area. So we need to ensure that we pass a law a couple of budgets ago that, for example, VAT reduction must be passed through consumer. Should the duty come down on a particular item, then that duty reduction must be passed on to the consumer and that is the reason why we reduced duty.

Normally we get FRCA to go and do that assessment. FRCA's core job essentially is to do with revenue collection based within the legal frame work they have, as opposed to political policy decision-making. They have a particular law they need to implement.

This essentially, Madam Chairperson, will provide the capacity within the Ministry of Economy to do policy planning and to gather intelligence. For example, we reduce the duty on outboard motor engines. We recently did a survey, the mark-up price by the three companies that bring in outboard motor engines is up to 85 percent, even though the duty on outboard motor engine is zero percent. Cereal, for example, they land about \$3 a carton, they sold at \$15 by the wholesaler to the supermarket. Then the supermarket sells it to the consumer at \$20, a huge mark-up.

In order for us to be able to say, "Alright, in two years' time, we will reduce that", we need to survey their market and we need to see what are the pricing changes and what is it. So then when we actually introduce the duty reduction, they cannot play around with the system because we would have tracked it. That is the reason why we have this Unit. There are a number of other things that this Unit will do.

We need to have that level of economic intelligence and gathering of data, to be able to ensure that whenever we actually put in place policies, the benefit of that is actually passed on to the ordinary Fijians.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Any other comments? Honourable Leawere.

HON. M.R. LEAWERE.- Madam Chairperson, just some clarification on Programme 1-5, SEG 1 (Allowances).

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. M.R. LEAWERE.- No, no, I am just making a comparison.

And in Programme 1-6, SEG 1 (Personal Emoluments) but no allowances. Does that mean that staff will not claim any allowance?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- The reason for that is because in Program 1-5, we have audit teams that actually go out and audit, for example, to one particular ministry, so they need to be paid meal allowance, etcetera, or they may need to travel. But on Program 1-6 is research and analysis. They do not need actually travel, they do the work inside the office.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Honourable Radrodro?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Madam Chairperson, the Programme 1-5, SEG 5, the National Audit Committee has an allocation of \$10,000. What work does this involve in this Committee, is it just expenses for meeting or what is this expenses for?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- When the Committee meets their expenses, morning tea, other expenses.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- There being no other comments, we will move to the next Programme. Head 4-1-7, are there any comments?

HON. MEMBERS.- No.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Head 4-1-8, are there any comments?

HON. MEMBERS.- No.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Head 4-1-9, are there any comments?

Honourable Dulakiverata?

HON. J. DULAKIVERATA.- Madam Chairperson, Program 1-7 SEG 7 (National Asset Management Framework - \$207,143, I just need clarification on this?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- We have gone back.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Honourable Member, we cannot go back.

(Laughter)

Honourable Members, do not worry about others, just worry about yourself. If you have any comments, make your comments but do not worry about what anyone else's say. Anyway, for the last time, we will respond to your question.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Chairperson, this caters for the salaries and FNPF payment of the five project staff engaged with the National Fixed Asset Register Project. The staff

includes; Senior Accounts Officer (2), Accounts Officer (1), Clerical Officer (2). The project team, Madam Chairperson, was established to undertake the lead role of counting the whole of government asset and compile the National Fixed Asset Register.

Currently, the team is formulating the Government Fixed Asset Management Framework and reviewing the Fixed Asset Policy. The need for the Fixed Asset Register, as Honourable Members would know, is critical for the implementation of Accrual Accounting. As we know we engage in cash accounting and we need to get into accrual accounting for running a modern day Civil Service but we need to have an account of all our assets.

Head 4-1-10, are there any comments?

HON. MEMBERS.- No.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- We will move on to Programme 2 Activity 1?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Just a clarification, Madam Chairperson, on SEG 7; I notice that the Population Census allocation of \$14.5 million is under requisition, and I understand that survey is probably going to be done pretty soon so I am just wondering why it is under requisition?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Chairperson, I think Honourable Members need to understand that when things are under requisition, it does not mean they cannot spend the money, but because it is a huge capital outlay. For example, they may want to buy tablets, so we need to ensure that they have gone through the proper processes. They simply put in the requisition request, and then comes to the Permanent Secretary to make sure the boxes are ticked because it is a huge project.

The Bureau of Statistics is now generally engaged in such large procurement, the day to day function. If you look at the total expenditure for 2015-2016, only \$5.1 million; 2016-2017 increased because you have to give it some additional money, it was \$13 million. Now it has gone up to \$20 million.

If you look at it generally, they get about \$5 million, so this is why we have put it under (R). But a lot of the work is being done, the tenders get called for one of them, and that is what it is for.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Any other comments?

HON. MEMBERS.- No.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- There being no other comments, we will now vote. Parliament will vote on Head No. 4.

The Question is that the amount in Head 4 - Ministry of Economy, be approved.

Does any Member oppose the motion?

(Chorus of Ayes and Noes)

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- There being opposition, Parliament will vote on the motion.

Votes cast:

Ayes	-	31
Noes	-	12
Not Voted	-	7

There being 31 Ayes, 12 Noes, 7 Not Voted, the motion is agreed to.

Head 4 – Ministry of Economy, agreed to.

Honourable Members, we will now adjourn for a well-deserved dinner. Enjoy your dinner. We will resume at 8.00 p.m.

The Parliament adjourned at 7.04 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 8.00 p.m.

Head 5 – Ministry of iTaukei Affairs

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- The floor is now open for any comments and we will look at Programme 1, Activity 1. Do we have any comments?

Head 5-1-1, Honourable Radrodro?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Madam Chairperson, on this Programme, SEG 6, the Turaga ni Koro Allowance of \$1,483,179, can we get a clarification of whether this already had the 15 percent increase and for how many *turaga ni koro* is this for?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- The question is how many *turaga ni koro*, I think it is over a thousand *turaga ni koro* but all of them are getting 15 percent pay rise.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Madam Chairperson, just a clarification whether the 15 percent increase has been effected in this, *Turaga ni Koro* Allowance, 15 percent increase, is it?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- 15 percent increase, yes.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- I was doing my checking, the 2016 allocation was \$1,074,000 as compared to \$1,480,000, so it is over 30 percent increase, is that in order?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- No, it is a 15 percent increase.

HON. RATU S. MATANITOBUA.- In SEG 5, Madam Chairperson, can the Honourable Minister explain the allocation of *iTaukei* Roadshow, from \$70,000 last year, to \$100,000 next year?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- There is an increase of \$30,000. They are having more roadshows, there is a demand for *iTaukei* roadshows.

HON. RATU S. MATANITOBUA.- Roadshows for provinces?

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- Anywhere in Fiji.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- All over Fiji.

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- If you want, we can bring it to your province. We are coming to your province, anyway.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Any other comments?

HON. RATU K. KILIRAKI.- Madam Chairperson, in SEG 6, *Mata-ni-Tikina* Allowance (\$428,600), same as last year and I have a motion to amend for an increase by 15 percent.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Would you like to fill in the form, please, for your amendment?

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Madam Chairperson, I have a motion to increase Programme 1-1 SEG 7 – Village By Laws, to be increased by \$500,000.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- I thought you opposed it?

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- I thought you opposed Village By Laws?

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- I will tell you the reason, because I need more consultation.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Honourable Members, if you are proposing an increase, could you justify why such an increase, would you like to fill the form?

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Yes, it has been filled. It will not take too long.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Any other comments?

HON. J. DULAKIVERATA.- On SEG 7, Madam Chairperson, Implementation of Traditional Curriculum; what is this for?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, we have already clarified that.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- That has already been clarified.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- One clarification, Madam Chairperson, on that same SEG - Child Protection Programme by UNICEF (\$8,000).

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Is it too much or too little or do you want to take it out?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- The UNICEF actually, like it has a number of programmes, and is also partnering with the Ministry of *iTaukei* Affairs in respect of when the staff of Ministry of *iTaukei* Affairs goes out to the various villages and provinces, et cetera, they also built into that Child Protection Programme, talking about the virtues of protecting children. That is part of it.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Since there are no other comments, we will move on the next one.

Head 5-1-2, Honourable Dulakiverata?

HON. J. DULAKIVERATA.- On SEG 10, Madam Chairperson, we have there Demarcation of Unsurveyed Lands (\$216,000) and Survey of Unsurveyed Land (\$176,000). This seems to be a duplication. Why demarcate one job, and then you go and survey another job.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Honourable Chairperson, this expenditure has been there for years as the Honourable Member knows and Honourable Ratu Lalabalavu also knows that. He is the former Minister for Land and also knows about the *iTaukei* Affairs. They are two different aspects.

HON. RATU K. KILIRAKI.- Madam Chairperson, in SEG 10 - Demarcation of Village Boundaries (\$170,784). Last year, it was (\$198,000). Can we get a clarification as to this allocation? Also in SEG 7 – VKB Rollout (\$177,226).

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Chairperson, we have actually regularised some of these positions. They were project positions, so the funding has been transferred to SEG 1 in terms of the allocation because they were project post. So obviously these projects cannot keep on going as a project, the staff need to be regularised so they that become part of the full complement of staff.

You will see this thing throughout. In a number of other Ministries, a lot these projects have been project positions, but we need them continuously. So they are now given fulltime employment as opposed to every year signing contracts. They are given three years or five years contract now. Project

post by its very definition is just year to year, and some of these people have been doing these projects for five years or 10 years but they do not know whether in the next year, they will get that position or not. Now they get a three year or give year contract.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- On the demarcation of village boundaries?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- That is part of the Civil Service Reforms.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- On SEG 10. Demarcation of village boundaries he also asked.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam, I think that is what he was asking.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Is that was the one you asked?

HON. RATU K. KILIRAKI.- Yes the demarcation of village boundaries.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- You have been clarified?

HON. RATU K. KILIRAKI.- Yes.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Since there are no other comments, we will move on to Head 5-1-3.

HON. M.R. LEAWERE.- Madam Chairperson on SEG 7 - Cultural Awareness/*iTaukei* Festival (\$20,000); I just wonder whether it is enough, because you are going all over the country. Whether that amount is sufficient to cater for those activities?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- It is sufficient, Madam Chairperson. The Ministry staff actually have given their proposal forward and they are saying that is sufficient. They do not actually go and have one big one, they actually do finance a number of them and they work with the different festivals that are being held. So it is sufficient. We have a number of partners for that too.

HON. J. DULAKIVERATA.- Yes, Madam Chairperson, what is this programme, Cultural Mapping Programme (\$274,000)?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Cultural Mapping, Madam Chairperson, again is the feature of the Ministry of *iTaukei* Affairs. It takes into account the number of the specific peculiar cultural practices to different provinces, so there maybe, for example, even things like their tradition, the way you do your *yaqona* ceremony, et cetera, is different from area to area. So it is doing the mapping of that, it is the digital recording of that. Various practices are actually being recorded, so that is what the Cultural Mapping Programme is for. In fact this year, the Cultural Mapping Programme, in fact, has been given an increase of \$149,000. If you see the 149.4 figure and you look at SEG 7, that is the increase, so it becomes 422.7 now because there is a lot of interest in that.

There are a lot practices, for example, even things like herbal medicine made peculiar to a particular area, so it is the documentation of it. The map reading, different styles, of course, all of that are being recorded and documented.

It is very important, in particular with what Honourable Prem Singh talked about earlier on, when we want to bring in the intellectual property rights and protecting indigenous intellectual property rights, it is very important to have this. If you do not have this mapping exercise, and you get on to protecting



indigenous intellectual property, you need to be able to know what you are actually protecting. So, the mapping exercise is very important prior to it.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Honourable Leawere?

HON. M.R. LEAWARE.- Madam Chairperson, just in addition to that on the same SEG, Cultural Mapping Verification (\$33,440), are these two activities related?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Obviously, one team goes out and does the actual mapping. Then there needs to be authentication of it. That is what you call verification, because once you actually put it down as an intellectual property, you need to make sure that it is actually verifiable because someone may claim it to be peculiar to their particular region or particular area but someone else might claim it. For example, people from Rewa may claim something that Naitasiri does or whatever it is, so the verification process is quite important too in that process. It is interrelated.

HON. M.R. LEAWARE.- Madam Chairperson, the present emoluments in terms of the staff going out, are there any provisions for allowances? You got acting allowance.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- There is. We have had extensive discussions with the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs. As highlighted earlier on, we have also increased the allocation for them. So, there is sufficient funding for it there.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Any other comments? Honourable Ro Kiliraki.

HON. RATU K. KILIRAKI.- SEG 7, Special Revitalisation Programme - \$50,000. Can you give a clarification on that? What special revitalisation programme and the other one is the Review of the iTaukei Dictionary - \$20,000 also in SEG 7?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- The revitalisation, of course, there are certain areas for example that the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs through this particular institute may think that a particular practice may be being lost. Some people are not practising enough, there may be actual handicraft or particular practice in order to get the youths and the people from that particular area, you revitalise that particular programme. You see world throughout, some people may have moved out, become a lot more urbanised. So, we need to be able to get them to be able to revitalise that particular cultural practice or customary practice or handcraft practice or whatever the case may be.

A lot of work is done in the peri-urban areas too for this.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- The review of dictionary?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- The review of the iTaukei Dictionary. That is self-explanatory. We need to review the iTaukei Dictionary. Like all dictionaries throughout the world, whatever language there is, you need to have a programme under. As you will see also that under the Bainimarama Government we also introduced a number of Climate Change terminologies and there is actually a Climate Change terminology in the *iTaukei* language that actually has been released to get people to understand.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Any other clarification? There being no other, we will now look at the motions for amendment. The first one is by the Honourable Viliame Gavoka that Head 5 be increased by \$5 million in Programme 1, Activity 1, SEG 6 with respect to *Turaga ni Koro* allowance. Would you like to speak on your motion please?

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- I second the motion.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Thank you. Please speak on your motion.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Yes, thank you, Madam Chairperson. Our Fijian villages are under a structure; and if you live in the village; you know that it is highly structured. But I noticed that in the provision of needful services, there are people in place, but funding is always an issue; there is the village nurse, there is the *qoliqoli* warden. It is something that we just take for granted that will survive on its own. I am suggesting, Madam Chairperson, that the allowance for the *Turaga ni Koro* be increased to enable him to have a structure under him to do all the needful to help him run the civic needs of a village.

It is a settlement containing people numbering from 100 to 400 but it is always sad, Madam Chairperson, that when you drive through Fiji, you go past a township where everything is so well maintained, and you come to a village and you see that things are in disarray. People know what to do, but it is a matter of providing the resources to help them organise themselves.

The same structure that provides a service in a township should also be available in a village relative to its size. It is not so much the funding, Madam Chairperson, it is setting in place a structure that can function. I live in a village and I know there is a village nurse, I know there is a warden, I know someone is supposed to be doing something but it invariably fails because of the lack of resources. I think we are not asking to be given freebies in that sense....

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Honourable Member, we are looking at *Turaga ni Koro* allowance not resources.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- The allowance is to be given to the *Turaga ni Koro*....

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- How many *Turaga ni Koro* are we talking about?

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- There are about 1,100 *Turaga ni Koro* all over Fiji. They should be given the resources.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- But this is for allowance.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Well, I am looking at that to empower him to do what needs to be done at the village level. Tourism is big in this country, tourists visit the villages a lot, and they should go back and say, "Those are well maintained areas where people live." I know it is something that may be outside of the ambit of that allocation but I think we should start thinking seriously about a structure that we can rely on to do the needful, to keep the villagers to a standard that we would all like to see for our people. That is where I am coming from, Madam Chairperson.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- I think we need to be very clear on what we are talking about. You want an increase of \$5 million and there is already \$1 million allowance, which means \$6,483,179 for about 1,112 villages in this country. That is a lot of money of allowance.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Yes, but we are talking about a significant part of the population in Fiji who need this kind of organisation to give them the standard that they know that they want, they should have but they do not have the resources to do it. It is one way of starting them in the right direction, Madam Chairperson. Once we start this, it will motivate them to keep the structure alive. As I said, I live in the village and I see things falling apart because there is no resources to keep people motivated, to keep them going.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Thank you. Anyone else would like to speak on this motion?

HON. RATU K. KILIRAKI.- Yes, Madam Chairperson. I think the *Turaga ni Koro*'s role is also important as far as his role in the village, mostly a conduit from Government to the village in development services, and given the position now of dissemination of information, they probably need progressing to computers, a mobile phone. He has got a lot of role in the village in terms of social responsibilities as far as the development programme of the Government. So, he must be properly resourced to support the motion apart from the allowance that is given that is not enough. I commend the motion to amend, thank you.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Thank you. Any other comments? There being no other, we will now vote on this motion that Head 5 be increased by \$5 million in Programme 1, Activity 1, SEG 6 with respect to *Turaga ni Koro* allowance.

Does anyone oppose the motion?

(Chorus of Ayes and Noes)

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- There being opposition, Parliament will vote on the motion.

<u>Votes cast:</u>		
Ayes	-	15
Noes	-	31
Not voted	-	4

There being 15 Ayes, 31 Noes and 4 Not Voted, the motion is defeated.

We will move on to the next motion. It is from the Honourable Nawaikula that Head 5 be increased by \$500,000 in Programme 1, Activity 1- SEG 7 with the respect to Village By-Laws. Does anyone second the motion?

HON. J. DULAKIVERATA.- Madam Chair, I second the motion.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Thank you, we have a seconder and therefore I will ask Honourable Nawaikula to speak on his motion.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Madam Chair, my motion is asking that the allocation now of \$100,000 be increased by \$500,000 so that the total is \$600,000. When I initially moved this motion the other side said "but you opposed it" but there is a reason why I am moving this motion. It is to allow the consultation process to be conducted nicely, appropriately, completely and as it is, what has been done is not enough. The reason for that, the Village By-laws is evil. One example is this, if you go to your plantation and you see an animal, you can kill it, after killing it the law says "you can share it". What kind of law is that? I have been asking the drafters of this law, please go back to your boss (the Honourable Attorney- General) to teach you how to draft proper laws. There is no law like that - when you see an animal, you kill the animal and you share it. There is another law that is there which says "you cannot get married until you have a house". So you need much, much more consultation than what you have now.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- I am saying it now, it is evil.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- What did you say to it when they came to you?

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- It is evil. I told them this law is evil, it is in breach of our right, it is taking away the authority of the *vanua*, it is vesting that authority in another person whereas the human rights of the indigenous people says, “they must be let to look after their own independently and the Government must facilitate it, the Government must understand this, and the Government must know that what it is doing is wrong.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- We understand what we are trying to do.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- And we need much, much more consultation. So we have to put a lot of money into this so we can teach the Government the right thing to do. That is the whole purpose of this because they are doing it the wrong the way. They are doing it against the will of the people, they are trying to impose their will, that is what is happening. You need this money to go around and explain again because I have been to one or two consultation and it is not a consultation, it is an invitation for people to come and you explain; that is not consultation.

Consultation means you must get their views, exactly and you have not been getting their views. You will be surprised how many kind of views are out there. You do not draft a law and tell people, “consult” and you impose it that is not consultation. That is totally false and wrong. I telling you again, Madam Chairperson, what the Government is doing is wrong, it is in breach of the rights of this people and I am asking them, “please respect them, please respect the indigenous people of this country.” That is the reason, we need this money so that we can teach them, we are telling them now what to do, go back to them, go and talk to them, go and sit down with them but do not impose your will on them. This money will empower you to do that and please do it.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Thank you. Do we have any other comments in support of this motion or non-support?

HON. J. DULAKIVERATA.- Madam Chairperson, we all come from villages. The consultation should include all the members of the villages. Now, the consultation is only done to people who live in the villages and most of the people there like he had been saying they just listen, what they are told “yes”. They do not seek for more advice, they do not consult before they give the advice. Sometimes we come to the village, they say, “what happened to this? We already agreed”. Did you know what you are agreeing to? No, they just told us to do this and we did that. I think the process should include every member of the village so that when you have a law everyone should understand and everyone should contribute because when you finish from here you go back to the village, you will be affected by that law. So it is very important that you contribute, you are in advance, and you should be consulted.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Thank you. Any other comments? There being no other comments, we will now vote on this motion that Head 5 be increased by \$500,000 in Programme 1, Activity 1-SEG 7 with respect to Village-By-Laws. Does anyone oppose?

(Chorus of Ayes and Noes)

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- There being opposition, Parliament will vote on this motion.

Votes cast:

Ayes	-	15
Noes	-	31
Not Voted	-	4

There being 15 Ayes, 31 Noes and 4 Not Voted, the motion is defeated.

We will now move onto the next motion by the Honourable Ratu Kiliraki that Head 5 be increased by 15 percent in Programme 1, Activity 1 –SEG 6 with respect to *Mata-ni-Tikina*. Does anyone second this motion?

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Madam Chairperson, I second the motion.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Thank you. Honourable Ratu Kiliraki would you like to speak on your motion?

HON. RATU K. KILIRAKI.- Yes, Madam Chairperson. Can you amend, it should be 50 percent or \$214,300 - that is 50 percent of \$428,600. Madam Chairperson, \$428,600 is the current allocation, so 50 percent of that to be increased by on top of that allocation.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- So in fact you have amended your first amendment because at first it says 15 percent?

HON. RATU K. KILIRAKI.- Yes, Madam Chairperson. It should have been 50 percent.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. RATU K. KILIRAKI.- My reason is this, you have increased the *Turaga-ni-Koro* who looks after only one *koro*. *Mata-ni-Tikina*, there are ten or more than ten villages so his role is more expanded than the *Turaga-ni-Koro*. Also they are required to go to the *Bose-ni-Yasana*. So his role is much wider and this accessibility to other villages, if it is more than ten like in the Tikina of Naitasiri, *Tikina* of Waidina and geographically the locations are so wide and very difficult too in some places. So that is my reasoning for the increase in the allowances of the *Mata-ni-Tikina*.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Thank you. Any other comments?

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Yes, Madam Chairperson. Similar to what I said earlier, we need to strengthen the ability of those we consider the officials at the village level and *tikina* level to be empowered to do their work. I know people are now refusing to serve as *Turaga-ni-Koro*.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- No, we are talking about the *Mata-ni-Tikina*.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Yes, I am just talking about the hierarchy in the village now. If people are refusing to be *Turaga-ni-Koro* they will also be refusing to be *Mata-ni-Tikina* because of the load they carry especially in a monetary sense. We must remember, Madam Chairperson, all of us here want to go back to the village whether you live in a palace in Suva or wherever, you are a *iTaukei*, you will go back to the village.

We must maintain that structure well and this is 2017; you cannot say they used to do it traditionally 30 years ago, they will be alright. It is different now. Moreso now in the past with the lease money that used to go to the *Turaga-ni-Mataqali*, if some of that money is to going to the village thing. Now that FijiFirst has distributed the money to everyone, it is very hard to get people to commit to the group, to the village, to the *tikina*. That is why I said earlier, we must empower this hierarchy in the village and the *tikina* to carry out the work. Whether you live in Australia or wherever you want to come back to your *koro* occasionally and that *koro*, that *tikina* must be maintained at a level that that should be in keeping with what it is today. That is where we are coming from Madam Chairperson.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Thank you any other comments. There being no other comments Parliament will vote on this motion that Head No. 5 be increased by 50 percent \$214,300 in Programme 1, Activity 1, SEG 6 with respect to *Mata-ni-Tikina*. Does anyone oppose the motion?

(Chorus of Ayes and Noes)

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- There being opposition, Parliament will vote on the motion.

Votes cast:

Ayes	-	15
Noes	-	31
Not voted	-	4

There being 15 Ayes, 31 Noes and 4 Not Voted, the motion is defeated.

Parliament will now vote on Head No. 5 and the question is, that the amount in Head No. 5 - Ministry of *iTaukei* Affairs be approved. Does any Member oppose the motion?

(Chorus of Ayes and Noes)

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- There being opposition, Parliament will vote on the motion.

Votes cast:

Ayes	-	30
Noes	-	14
Not voted	-	6

There being 30 Ayes, 14 Noes and 6 Not Voted, the motion is agreed to.

Head 5 – Ministry of *iTaukei* Affairs, agreed to.

Head 6 – Ministry of Defence and National Security

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Thank you Honourable Members. We will look now at Head No. 6 – Ministry of Defence and National Security. The floor is now open for comments and we are looking at Programme 1, Activity 1. Honourable Parmod Chand.

HON. P. CHAND.- Head 6, Programme 1, Activity 1 – General Administration. I request for some clarification, can the Honourable Minister please advise when we can expect to see the long awaited National Security and Defence review as allocated here in SEG 7, fact that a cost of \$1.15 million. The consultations have been going on for some time now Head 6, Programme 1, Activity 1, SEG 7? We want answers.

HON. RATU. I. KUBUABOLA.- Thank you, Madam Chairperson. To this question the process is ongoing and that is why we need the allocation for the coming year.

HON. P. SINGH.- On the same SEG 7 – provision for UN Military Advisor, I believe this was Ministry of Foreign Affairs before and now it is put under Defence and the cost then was \$500,000, now the allocation is \$400,000?

HON. RATU. I. KUBUABOLA.- This allocation is to be with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, it's been transferred to the Ministry of Defence for 2017/2018. The reduction from \$500,000 to \$400,000 is enough for the military advisor.

HON. RATU S. MATANITOBUA.- Head 6, Programme 1, Activity 1, SEG 6 - ....  
Can the Honourable Minister advise whether this allocation for local design

HON. RATU. I. KUBUABOLA.- Sorry Madam Chairperson, is the Honourable Member referring to SEG 6?

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Yes.

HON. RATU. I. KUBUABOLA.- SEG 6 – disarmament affairs, \$45,100 this is a new inclusion in this budget.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Any other comments? We will move on to the next.

We will now vote on the Head, the Parliament will vote on Head No. 6, the question is that the amount of Head No. 6 Ministry of Defence and National Security be approved, does any Member oppose the motion?

(Chorus of “Ayes” and “Noes”)

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Parliament will vote on the motion.

Votes cast:

Ayes	-	32
Noes	-	14
Not voted	-	4

There being 32 Ayes, 14 Noes and 4 Not Voted, the motion is agreed to.

Head 6 – Ministry of Defence and National Security, agreed to.

Head 7 - Ministry of Employment, Productivity and Industrial Relations

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- We will move onto Head No. 7 Ministry of Employment, Productivity and Industrial Relations. Does any member want to speak on this?

Programme 1, Activity 1?

HON. M.R. LEAWERE.- SEG 5 apprentice scheme. 2016 it was \$4000 and again in 2017/2018 we have the same amount, no increase in that. Some clarifications be made on that please.

HON. J. USAMATE.- This is money that is been set aside for people who work as apprentices within Government, so there have been apprentices setup within the Government printing, those that are learning their trade and also in Government shipping. So the numbers do not increase or decrease because it depends on the supply and demand required by those two entities which is in this case Government shipping services and Government printing.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Any other comments?

We will move on to the next one,

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Programme 1, Activity 2, any comments?

HON. MEMBERS.- No.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Programme 1, Activity 3, any comments?

HON. MEMBERS.- No.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Programme 1, Activity 4, any comments?

HON. MEMBERS.- No.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Programme 1, Activity 5, any comments?

HON. MEMBERS.- No.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Programme 1, Activity 6, any comments?

HON. MEMBERS.- No.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- There being no motions for amendment, Parliament will vote on Head No 7.

Question put.

The Question is:

That the amount in Head 7 – Ministry of Employment, Productivity and Industrial Relations, be approved. Does any Member oppose the motion?

(Chorus of Ayes and Noes)

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- There being opposition Parliament will vote on the motion.

Votes cast:

Ayes	-	32
Noes	-	14
Not voted	-	4

There being 32 Ayes, 14 Noes and 4 Not Voted, the motion is agreed to.

Head 7 - Ministry of Employment, Productivity and Industrial Relations, agreed to.

Head 8 – Ministry of Foreign Affairs

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- We will now move onto Head 8 – Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Do we have any comments on Programme 1, Activity 1?



HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Programme 1, Activity 1, SEG 7 – there is a decrease in terms of special expenditures there from \$630,000 to \$430,000. Can you give a reasoning why the change in the estimate?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- SEG 7 is the Colombo plan, decrease of \$200,000.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- I cannot hear it.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- SEG 7, this is the special expenditure and the Colombo Plan has a decrease of \$200,000.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Any other comments?

HON. RATU K. KILIRAKI.- Madam Chairperson, SEG 6, Activity 1 – International Seabed Authority only, \$1,230 - so it looks small. Can I get an explanation please?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- This is an annual fees payable, that is all there is.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- This is an annual pledge.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- It is an annual p.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Any other comments?

HON. MEMBERS.- No.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- There being none, we will move on to Programme 2, Activity 1. Honourable Radrodro?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Programme 2, Activity 1 - Refurbishment of Overseas Missions.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Which SEG?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- SEG 8 - \$300,000.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Yes. What about it?

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- A clarification on that.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Yes, we have the embassies throughout our missions. It is not specific to anyone but we have a general one, so the different embassies they make a bid for that, whatever is required and the head office over here decides which one requires it. There is of course sometimes we need to be able to refurbish some of them. We have Abu Dhabi for example, that needs a bit of refurbishment but it is generally made available for the refurbishment of overseas missions.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Honourable Bulitavu?

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Thank you, Madam Chairperson, SEG 9 – Purchase of Office furniture and equipment. Are they new furniture for new missions or replacements?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- No it is for the existing overseas missions, you know these things are normal wear and tear and we need to be able to buy equipment whether it is computers or other types of equipment or furniture for the respective missions - FJ\$150,000.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Any other comments?

There being no other comments and no motions for amendment, Parliament will vote on Head 8.

Question put.

Does any Member oppose the motion?

(Chorus of Ayes and Noes)

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- There being opposition, Parliament will now vote.

<u>Votes Cast:</u>		
Ayes	-	32
Noes	-	14
Not voted	-	4

There being 32 Ayes, 14 Noes, 4 Not Voted, the Motion is agreed to.

#### Head No. 9 - Independent Bodies

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- We have 1 SEG under Activity General Administration. Does anyone have any comment to make on that allocation? Honourable Radrodro.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Madam Chairperson, just clarification under the Office of the Auditor General allocation. Can we just get an update will this mean in an increase in staff or is it just an increase in the salary percentage reviewed? This increase from \$4.3 million to \$4.6 million.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- It is a requirement by the Auditor General's office and that is what they requested for which includes salary increases and any other expenses overall. Similarly, we can talk about the other measures for example with Parliament, we have got an increase of \$159,000, Office of DPP you have of course the Judiciary has got an increase. The reason why as we explained in the Budget we have put these are all independent bodies provided for another Constitution. Fijian Elections Office, as you know, that they have to prepare for the Elections. So, whether the Elections are held in this upcoming financial year or 2018-2019, they still have to go ahead and incur those expenses and that is why they have got that, similarly with the Auditor-General's office. So, when all of these bodies actually get audited, the Auditor-General actually goes directly into those bodies.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Any more comments?

HON. RO T.V. KEPA.- I want to move an amendment.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Fill in the form. Now, speak on the motion Honourable Leader of Opposition.

HON. RO T.V. KEPA.- Madam Chairperson, my motion is on the Parliamentary allocation of \$500,000, in that what I am proposing here is that we have offices, Parliamentary offices in the main parts

of the country, one in the West, maybe two in the North, one in Labasa and Savusavu. As we have people who want to access Parliamentary information and they do not have internet and they would like to ask for some services from Parliament and it is difficult for them to get here to...

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- You are talking about Parliamentary offices or Party offices.

HON. RO T.V. KEPA.- Parliamentary offices which the parties can also access.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- We do not have parliamentary offices in those places.

HON. RO T.V. KEPA.- That is my proposal - \$500,000.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- You want the Parliamentarians have access or assistance from Members from the different parties.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Party offices.

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- Internet shop.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- I think you are talking about party offices because...

HON. RO T.V. KEPA.- The FijiFirst would like an internet shop there, they are very welcome to have that.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- You can now need to propose for your Party office. Parliament office we are the ones that will have to propose.

HON. RO T.V. KEPA.- Madam Chairperson, we have had opportunities to visit other countries where the Parliaments also have that assistance to the ordinary people where the different parties can come in on different days and also work there.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- You can only speak on your party, not on Parliament not on behalf of Parliament. So, I think you are talking about party officers.

HON. RO T.V. KEPA.- Not necessarily just for our party.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- But we are not, we do not see the need yet to establish those.

HON. RO T.V. KEPA.- It has worked in other countries, Madam Chairperson, and we are just proposing it here.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- It has to come from us, we have not proposed that.

HON. RO T.V. KEPA.- Maybe the Honourable Prime Minister

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Do you have any other motion?

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Madam Chairperson, it is not only for one party, it is where we can all meet our people, We can all be there. There is a place of contacts that is put together by Parliament, where Parliamentarians can meet their members; whether it is in the West or in the North and we have seen it in other jurisdictions.

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- Churchill Park.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- They may call it other names in other countries. It happens in Canada but the principle is the same. It plays where members can meet the general public, immaterial of what party you belong to. No one flies any banner there, no labels, no parties but they know that in Lautoka there is an office, where you can meet the Parliamentarians. That is where I am coming from, Madam Chairperson.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Thank you and Parliament takes note of that need and we will progress it, but not yet for this budget.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Chairperson, these are independent bodies. These independent bodies come and make their submissions. The Parliament is an independent body. It is not for us to tell the Parliament what they should do, where they should open up the offices. In the same way, we cannot go and tell the Office of the Auditor-General, the Fijian Elections Office or the DPP. What is being suggested is that, these people are trying to interfere with the independence of the Secretary-General to Parliament and your Office, Madam Chairperson.

You set your own agenda and as provided for under the Constitution, we have to provide the money. This is why there is one line items. What they are talking about is about constituency offices, Madam Chairperson, and as we know that their moneys have been made available to the different political parties and they can use that money, link it to their Head Office and do what they want to do with it, Madam Chairperson.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Thank you. As I have said, we take new notes, we know of what we are provided.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- We have an allocation, being Members of Parliaments, and you give us an office there and there. I mean, you cannot say that Parliament does not provide the support. You, Parliament provide the support for Parliamentarians and it does not say only in Suva, it does not say that, you can provide us support in other parts of Fiji. Thank you.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- We note the need and we will try and progress that.

HON. P. SINGH.- On Head 9 SEG 6, on independent bodies we see that the Estimates have now crafted together all the independent bodies. I will give you an example, the Judiciary, which has a budget of \$44 million last year has now increased to \$54 million with no specifications, so if these independent bodies as they used to appear before, because they are all independent bodies, they work separately, so for ease of reference, the Judiciary budget from \$44 to \$54 million, what is the \$10 million?

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Honourable Prem Singh, from Parliament because we are also included here, this figure is the amount that we had submitted to the Ministry of Economy.

HON. P. SINGH.- I am not seeking clarification on the allocations, Madam, but I am seeking clarifications now that all the independent bodies have been clustered in one Head and the specific allocations, the increases or decreases are not itemised, so we would not know what the allocations are for?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- In terms of meeting their constitutional obligations, so for example in the same way, the Parliament is constitutionally independent so the Secretary-General to Parliament comes and presents the budget and she will make sure that the budget that she requests for will actually help her meet her constitutional obligations.

Similarly, you have the Honourable Chief Justice and the Chief Registrar will appear and they will actually ask for budgetary allocation to help them meet their constitutional obligations and duties. So whether it is for the running of the courts, maintenance of the courts, rebuilding of courts, or building of new courts, it is all put together as a separate item and they all have one line items. This is actually adhering to the constitutional requirements ensuring their independence, that is why we put like that.

So when the Auditor-General will actually go in, they have their own set of independence, they have their own procurement rules also which has to be published or gazetted. So for example you have the Fijian Elections Office, you can go to the Fijian Elections Office and pick up the Standing Orders and look at the procurement rules, so when the Auditor-General goes and audits them, he will have to adhere to the standards that they have set and see whether they actually meet various international standards or various procurement procedures set under the Finance Management Act, similarly, with the Parliament, Office of the Auditor-General, Office of the DPP.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Any other comments, questions?

HON. M.R. LEAWERE.- Just a clarification, in terms of this allocation, does that also include staff who stay long after Committee meetings, does this include that? What about medical insurance for Parliamentarians?

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Not yet.

Any other comments?

There being no other comments, Parliament will vote on Head No. 9.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Just a clarification on the increase from Judiciary and ODPP from the huge increase in Judiciary from \$14 million and ODPP of \$507,000, there is no clear clarification in terms of the write-up of those increases?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Sir, I did not get it.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- The basis of the increase as per write-up is not even properly explained. It just says the increase of \$0.5 million.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- As it says there, the increase of \$14.2 million to bolster the court system and enhance the quality of Judicial Services in Fiji, that is what it is for.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- The Office of the DPP?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- The Office of the DPP will also increase salary increments for the DPP's Office. It is only \$500,000..

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Any other comments?

Parliament will now vote on Head No. 9.

Question put.

The Question is:

That, the amount in Head No. 9 - Independent Bodies, be approved.

Does any Member oppose the motion?

(Chorus of Ayes and Noes)

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- There being opposition, Parliament will vote on the motion.

<u>Votes cast:</u>		
Ayes	-	31
Noes	-	13
Not Voted	-	6

There being 31 Ayes, 13 Noes, 6 Not Voted, motion is agreed to.

Head No. 9 - Independent Bodies, agreed to.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- We will now move on to the next item on the Agenda.

Head No. 13 – Independent Commissions

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- The floor is now open for comments, if any, on Programme 1 Activity 1?

Since there are no comments, Parliament will vote on this Head.

Question put.

The question is:

That the amount in Head 13 - Independent Commissions, be approved.

Does any Member oppose the motion?

(Chorus of Ayes and Noes)

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Since there is opposition, Parliament will vote.

<u>Votes cast:</u>		
Ayes	-	30
Noes	-	11
Not Voted	-	9

There being 30 Ayes, 11 Noes, 9 Not Voted, the motion is agreed to.

Head 13 – Independent Commissions, agreed to.

Head 14 – Ministry of Disaster, Management and Meteorological Services

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- The floor is now open for any comments.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- On the Disaster, Relief and Rehabilitation Fund, just a clarification on that?

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Madam Chairperson, this allocation is consistent every year, the \$1 million allocation and this goes to the Prime Minister's Relief Trust. There is also an allocation in Head 50 which is \$5 million, that is for Disaster Management as well.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Any other comments, Programme 1 Activity 1?

HON. M.R. LEAWERE.- Madam Chairperson, on Activity 1 SEG 5 – Purchase of Equipment (\$100,000), there is an equipment which costs \$100,000, can we have an explanation on that?

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Thank you, Madam Chairperson. In the ministry now, one of the key requirement is technology, particularly with early warning systems.

So, we are in the process of bringing in early warning systems for *tsunami* and likewise early warning system for flood as well which will be under the hydrology but some that were installed initially by the Japanese Government is still maintained by the ministry and this is the allocation for that, Madam Chair.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Thank you any other comments? There have been no other comments Parliament will vote on Head 14 and the question is; Ministry of Disaster Management and Metrological Services be approved?

I am sorry we are talking about Programme 2, Activity 1. We will now move on to Programme 2, Activity 2 any comments?

HON. MEMBERS.- No.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- No comments, Programme 2, Activity 3.

HON. MEMBERS.- No.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- No comments, Programme 2, Activity 4.

HON. MEMBERS.- No.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- No comments, Programme 2, Activity 5.

HON. MEMBERS.- No.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA. – Activity 3, SEG 9, the Weather Observation System. Can you get a bit of a run down on that please, Honourable Minister?

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Honourable Minister you have the floor.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA. – Page 67, at the bottom the last one.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- \$1,478,719.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA. – Activity 3, Programme 2, SEG 9, there is \$1.4 million on the Automatic Weather Observation System.

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Thank you , Madam Chairperson. The automatic weather observation system is in the main airports, particularly Nadi and Nausori. It provides information that will determine that whether it is safe for the aircraft to land or it is not safe to do so. So, that is the automatic weather observation system. It gives information on the runway.

So, for this allocation Madam Chairperson, on the replacement of the Automatic Weather Observation System this is rollover from 2016 to 2017 so that is going to be continue for these stations.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Honourable Salote Radrodro.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Thank you, Madam Chair. On Programme 2, Activity 2, SEG 8 on Upgrade of Outer Island Stations if the minister can just clarify which outer islands are these?

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Madam Chairperson, they are in terms of the weather stations we have 32 Automatic Weather Stations and we have ...stations and of course a business continuity centre which is the one in Laucala Bay. So, most of these outer islands are from Vunisea in Kadavu and of course in Yasawa, particularly where we also have a small airstrip as well so that is where we have these stations.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Honourable Anare Vadei.

HON A.T. VADEI.- Madam Chairperson, regarding this Programme 2, Activity 3, SEG 7 ISO 9001:2000 QMS. I believe that is the outdated since we are 2008 QMS so \$25,0000 that is not enough, can we upgrade that to 2008.

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU. – Madam Chairperson, that is why the allocation is there is for the upgrading.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Any other comments? Honourable Bulitavu?

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- SEG 8, Madam Chairperson, in regards to the Construction of the New Labasa Weather Office, probably what is the progress because this is a continuing project year after year?

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Honourable Minister.

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Yes, Madam Chairperson, this will be in Vaturekuka in Labasa so the location as introduced in SEG 8.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Honourable Ro Kiliraki.

HON. RATU K. KILIRAKI.- Similarly, Madam Chairperson, SEG 9 Installation of Water Level and Rainfall Telemetry Instruments. Can we have the progress and clarification on that please?

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Yes, Madam Chairperson, we have install a few. In Korovou in Tailevu we have a set of water level and rainfall. Note the difference, water level is just to determine the level in the rivers and the rainfall is usually upstream particularly because the hydrology unit has also shifted from the Water Authority of Fiji into the MET Office that was after TC Evan since 2012. Nasikawa River in Vanua Levu, we have two sets of water level and rainfall. Navala in Ba we have a set for water level and rainfall, Dobuilevu in Wainibuka river, its water level only and Vitogo in Lautoka, one set of water level and rainfall. This Telemetry Systems, Madam Chairperson, will transmit



data to the National Weather Forecasting Centre in Nadi. This is very, very critical based on the ... from the previous disasters. We need to monitor the water levels so that we can inform the public in advance particularly when the water level is reaching or what we call the critical level so they need to be evacuated as we are adhering the critical level so these are the main water ways, Madam Chairperson.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Thank you, any more comments, Honourable Radrodro.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Madam Chairperson, Programme 2, Activity 3, SEG 4 the allocation of \$240,600 for software IT infrastructure. This is a new software or existing software or what is this allocation?

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Honourable Minister.

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Madam Chairperson, again the new technology that you will also note that in say Activity 2, Programme 2, SEG 4, on Barographs because we are still using the old systems. With this new technology coming in because the Nadi station and most of our centres that feed in to Nadi as well will look after the region as well we need to be on par, we need to be equip with the modern technologies so this is why we need to continue to upgrade our software and IT infrastructure.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Thank you, any more comments? Activity 4 and Activity 5, Honourable Bulitavu.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Just in Activity 3, SEG 5, that Operational Cost of Upper Air Logistics.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Honourable Minister.

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- the Upper Air Logistics, Madam Chairperson, at eleven o'clock every morning particularly in Nadi, they release the balloons, that is the upper air logistics, as they call it. It registers atmospheric conditions because it can translate it to the air traffic controllers as well. So, that the allocation for that activity.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Are there any more comments?

HON. MEMBERS.- No.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Activity 4?

HON. MEMBERS.- No.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Activity 5?

HON. M.R. LEAWERE.- Madam Chairperson, on under this Activity, SEG 5 – Caretakers Expense (\$8,000) and when we look at the same Activity but SEG 2, the amount \$12,000, are they are the same? Can I seek clarification on that? Sorry to take you back Honourable Minister. I know there are two different entities there but under the same Ministry. Are they allowances? Just seek clarification, Madam Chairperson.

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Madam Chairperson, these are different type of activities. Activity 3 is on Weather Forecasting Services and Hydrology is on Activity 5. I had mentioned that Hydrology was shifted from WAF. The Hydrology Unit used to be with WAF. After the flooding in Nadi in 2012, one of the lessons learnt was that, they were not communicating - the Weather Office and

the Hydrology Unit because it is the Hydrology Unit that will give information on the flooding. So they have their separate installations as well and they have shifted allocations as well for their Caretakers. Thank you, Madam Chairperson.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- There being no other comments or clarifications, Parliament will now vote on Head 14.

The question is that the amount in Head 14 - Ministry of Disaster, Management and Meteorological Services, be approved. Does any Member oppose the motion?

(Chorus of Ayes and Noes)

There being opposition, Parliament will vote on the motion.

Votes cast:

Ayes	-	31
Noes	-	11
Not voted	-	8

There being 31 Ayes, 11 Noes, 8 Not Voted, the motion is agreed to.

Head 14 - Ministry of Disaster, Management and Meteorological Services, agreed to.

Head 15 – Ministry of Justice

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- The floor is now open for comments. Head 15-1-1, are there any comments?

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Madam Chairperson, I probably need a clarification on SEG 7 - Anti-Corruption Activities of \$100,000.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- You want to increase, decrease or remove?, Honourable Minister?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Chairperson, is for Anti-Corruption activities.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Honourable Aseri Radrodro?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Madam Chairperson, SEG - Digitisation Programme of \$1.2 million.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Chairperson, this is exactly as the name suggests, it is for the digitisation of various activities within the Ministry of Justice.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- We will move on to the next Programme - Programme 2 – Fiji Corrections Services. Are there any comments?

HON. MEMBERS.- No.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Head 15-2-2, any comments?

HON. P. SINGH.- Madam Chairperson, under this Activity, I I just need some clarification, Madam Chairperson. Last year's allocation for Fiji Corrections Services was \$41 million. This year's allocation is \$38.8 million.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- What SEG?

HON. P. SINGH.- It is the total allocation I am talking about. This allocation cater for possible pay rise in Civil Service Reform?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Chairperson, he cannot do that.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- What SEG?

HON. P. SINGH.- Just an overall comment, Madam Chairperson. The budget has been reduced from \$41 million to \$38.8 million.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Do you have any issue on this?

HON. P. SINGH.- Yes, how is the Civil Service Reform in this aspect factored in?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Chairperson, this is the Disciplined Forces. The Job Evaluation Exercise (JEE) as highlighted earlier on, the RFMF and the Fiji Corrections Services have already have their JEE. The only Disciplined Force that did not was the Fiji Police Force.

As Honourable Members should know, the Disciplined Forces are treated differently to the normal cadre of civil servants. So that does not affect the Fiji Corrections Service.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Any other comments?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Madam Chairperson, , SEG 5, there is an increase in allocation for uniforms \$1.051 million. As compared to last year the allocation for uniform is from \$800,000 to \$1 million?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Because we are getting more Prison Wardens. We have got Lautoka opening up and Remand Centres, so that is why.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Any other comments?

HON. RATU K. KILIRAKI.- Madam Chairperson, SEG 7 – Standby Arrangement for Rapid Deployment to Peacekeeping Missions - \$105,650. Can I seek clarification on that allocation?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Yes, Madam Chairperson. You will see this allocation is also made for the other Disciplined Forces. Whenever there is a requirement for members of the Fiji Corrections Services to go overseas, there are certain expenses that are involved in upskilling and training them for that specific mission when they go overseas. Those funds are there as and when it is required when there is a redeployment required, that is why is under R

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Any more clarifications or comments? Honourable Leader of the Opposition?

HON. RO T.V. KEPAN.- Madam Chairperson, in SEG 7, Can I seek clarification on the Rehabilitation Programme, Yellow Ribbon and Poverty Alleviation that SEG?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Sorry, I could not hear that.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Programme 2, Activity 2, SEG 7; she would like clarification on all those allocations.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Madam Chairperson, those are specific programmes. I think there was an Honourable Member of the Opposition, who did talk about the rate of recidivism in Fiji.

The rate of recidivism, Madam Chairperson, you will be happy to know that we have actually reduced the rate which used to be 50 percent. So Rehabilitation Programme - \$200,000 is used for counselling services, vocational skills-based training to the inmates. Yellow Ribbon Project is an outreach programme to the community, educates and informs the community and society at large, of the important role and responsibility that they play in successfully reintegrating people who have actually been in prison.

Of course, Madam Speaker, the Poverty Alleviation Programme is part and parcel and link to that because as we know that due to socio-economic issues, many people may resort to crime because they do not have access to resources. So we actually help them in respect to sometimes resettling them and sometimes providing that level of assistance to them and also their families. It is part of an integrated process.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Any more comments? Honourable Ratu Kiliraki.

HON. RATU K. KILIRAKI.- Madam Chairperson, Head 15-2-1-8 - Construction of K9 Dog Unit - \$675,000. As for last year's Budget, it was \$474,000. We need a clarification. Madam Chairperson, and how many dogs also?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Lautoka has been refurbished, the new prison there, so we obviously need to build the Dog Unit as well for the K9 Dog Unit, as the name suggests.

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- Last year, it was small dogs, this year big dogs.

(Laughter)

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Any other comments? Honourable Radrodro.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Head 15-2-1-8 - Repair and Maintenance of Institutional Infrastructure - \$400,000. Is this involving the prisons itself?

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Honourable Minister?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- That includes, for examples, quarters, various other infrastructure within all of the Correction Services in Fiji. So it is not restricted to any particular area, it is a general sort of repair and maintenance allocation that has been made, whether it is Ba or Lautoka, Korovou.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Any other comments?

Since there are no proposition for amendment, therefore, Parliament will vote on Head 15.

The question is that the amount agreed on Head 15 - Ministry of Justice, be approved. Does any Member oppose the motion?

(Chorus of Ayes and Noes)

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- There being opposition, Parliament will vote on the motion.

<u>Votes cast:</u>		
Ayes	-	31
Noes	-	13
Not Voted	-	6

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- There being 31 Ayes, 13 Noes and 6 not voted, the motion is agreed to.

Head 15 – Ministry of Justice, agreed to.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Honourable Members, we have now concluded voting on Head 1 to Head to 15, as set out in the timetable agreed to by the Whips.

We will now adjourn the Committee of Supply until tomorrow. Honourable Members, I will resume the Speaker's Chair in order to adjourn the House.

(HON. SPEAKER resumed her seat)

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, thank you very much for your patience. Thank you very much for the debate that we have just gone through very smoothly. Thank you for your input.

Parliament will adjourn until tomorrow at 9.30 a.m. Have a restful night.

The Parliament adjourned at 9.29 p.m.